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ST. TRYPHONIUS AND THE BASILISK
After Carpaccio

ALLEGORIES

BY

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ETC.



WITH TWENTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
AMELIA BAUERLE

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1898

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ALLEGORIES



THE LIFE STORY OF ANER

I

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.—WORDSWORTH.

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
From that great deep before our world begins,
Whereon the Spirit of God moves as He will—
Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Down yon dark sea thou comest, darling boy.

TENNYSON.

THE KING ELYON was the greatest of all kings. Other lords and sovereigns claimed the sway over wide domains; but in these realms they were in reality his vassals, even when they most daringly pretended to avow their independence, and strove in open rebellion to thwart his high designs.

There were many points in the government of this mighty King which his subjects could not understand. It was impossible for them to comprehend the necessity for royal dealings which had to bear on the interests of regions more wide by far than those of the little corners of his kingdom in which they dwelt. Just as it is not every village peasant who can tell why the treaties are concluded, or the laws passed, which may seem for the moment to injure his little prosperity, so there were millions of King Elyon's subjects who were sorely perplexed by plans which he in his wisdom knew to be for the best. Yet the vast majority of his subjects could not but admit, when closely questioned, that he was wise and merciful and good, and that, even when his dealings with them seemed to be severe, he pitied them as a father pities the sufferings of his children.

Now King Elyon had many sons, and among them was one who was specially dear to him. His name was Aner, though during the earliest years of his life he was not called Aner, but Paedarion. Few could even guess why this particular son—who was not only the youngest of the family, but also among the least richly endowed—should be so specially the object of care and love to this great King. Others of his children were far more beautiful and strong, and looked quite radiant by the side of Aner. Indeed, there were some bad sons of King Elyon, who had long revolted from their father, who, from the first, not only despised Aner as a contemptible weakling—which, indeed, in himself, and apart from Elyon's love, he was—but even

regarded him, though he had done them no harm, with burning hatred. Almost from his birth they plotted against him, and, under disguise of flattery and false friendship, endeavoured to ruin or degrade him. The name of the worst of these bad revolted sons of the great King was Ashmod, and legions of evil spirits owned his sway.

But the very frailty of Paedarion, combined with some nameless charm which clung about him, inspired a tender and sacred interest for him among all the noblest and most glorious princes of Elyon's family. They took this youngest and feeblest of their brethren under their best care; they delighted in helping him; they were so full of joy, when he was good and happy, that they made their father's glorious palace ring to its inmost depths with enraptured jubilation; and when he showed himself unworthy, and his lot seemed to tremble in the balance, and it became even doubtful whether he might not range himself on the side of the rebel Ashmod, they took off the garlands of rose and amaranth which were twined about their sunny locks, and their eyes were dim with 'such tears as angels weep.'

For high reasons of his own King Elyon did not allow Paedarion to be nurtured in the Imperial palace where he himself dwelt, vast as were its dimensions and inexhaustible as was its wealth. Though his heart yearned over the boy, yet for his own high purposes he deemed it best to remove him from his immediate presence, and to leave him to fight the battle

of life away from his proper home, amid circumstances which might have seemed far less delightful and far more full of peril and difficulty than those which were enjoyed by the elder and more richly gifted princes of that royal house.

To these high-born brethren—who never questioned Elyon's love or wisdom, yet would fain have learnt something of his purpose—the great King only said, 'My sons, if you could see all things as well as I do, you would know the reason why I send my little Paedarion away. All that I can now tell you is that I mean it for his highest happiness. You know that I have never *enforced* the obedience of any of you. Your faithfulness would be nothing to me if it did not spring from your own free will. It must be so with this my youngest born. He too, if he so wills it, must be free to follow in the desperate steps of Ashmod. I desire to train him for the cares and duties of his future heritage. I must send him away, but we shall have frequent tidings of him; you will be able to visit and to watch him without his knowledge, and I shall constantly have him under my own eye, even when he is least aware of it. I wish to train him so that he too may in due time take his place among you and be welcomed by you as a worthy member of this our kingdom.'

So King Elyon sent for Paedarion, who, though but a child, was very dear in his father's eyes, and exercised a strange power of fascination from his very weakness. The boy came, and smiled into his father's



KING ELYON AND PAEDARION

countenance, and the King clasped him to his heart and said :

‘ My child, I must send you far away from me and from this your true home. There is across the sea a lovely little island in my dominions, known as the Purple Island. Its inhabitants are called the Porphyrians. It is among them that you must be educated. My care will be over you, but your future must depend on yourself. I have had some rebellious sons, and Ashmod, the worst of them, is always trying to wean from me the affection of my other children. He has access to the Purple Island. But except by your own fault he cannot do you the smallest harm, and if you keep aloof from him, and from his emissaries, you have nothing to fear. Will you be always true to me, my little son ? ’¹

‘ As if I could ever be untrue to so good a father ! ’ said the child, looking up with his innocent eyes.

‘ Ah, my boy,’ said Elyon ; ‘ you are only putting on your armour now, and you will have to fight many a perilous battle before you can put it off.’

‘ But you will bring me back here, father ? ’

‘ If you keep the rules which I shall give you, Paedarion,’ said the King, ‘ you shall come back and shall be as royal and as happy as these your bright-faced brethren. But if you disobey me——’

The King paused and heaved a deep sigh.

¹ The Jews thought that every human soul before its birth into the world was taken to Sinai to hear the Commandments and learn the difference between right and wrong.

‘What then, my father? but I can never disobey you. I love you too dearly.’

‘Whatever happens,’ said Elyon, ‘you will still be the son of my love. Even if you go astray, IMRAH, the supremest of my sons, he—my other self—will do his utmost to bring you back to me and save you. But the Purple Island is far away, my child; and there you may forget me.’

At these words the child wept bitterly, but the King kissed away his tears and said:

‘Now listen to me, my child, before I bid you farewell. Your future happiness can only be secured by following my instructions.’

‘Perhaps I might by accident forget them, father.’

‘Nay,’ said the King, ‘I have had them carefully written out for you in a book, which you must always carry with you, and must often read. Further, I put upon your finger a ring in which is set a deep blue sapphire. It is a magic ring. If you disobey my commands this sapphire will grow paler and paler; if you *persist* in disobeying them it will gradually lose all its colour.’

‘But further than this, my child, there are two boys, twins, who—though as yet they have had no great concern in your life—must henceforth be your constant companions. Their name is Yetser; the elder is called Hatob, the younger Hara. Lay to heart what I now shall say to you.’¹

¹ These boys appear to have Hebrew names. In Hebrew, *Yetser* means ‘Impulse;’ *Hatob*, ‘the good;’ *Hara*, ‘the evil.’

‘Father, I will.’

‘On your relation to these two boys your future happiness must depend. They are very different from each other. The eldest, Hatob, is everything that I could desire. Make him your bosom friend, your guide, your leader, your example. Put your hand in his wherever you go. He will never mislead you, never abuse your confidence. You must regard him as your teacher. He has a voice which, though it sometimes seems to sink to a whisper, will always make itself heard if you listen to it. He will always be near you unless you drive him away. Listen for the voice of Hatob, and, if he warns you that you are going wrong, regard *his* words as though they were mine.

‘His twin brother Hara is as different from Hatob as possible. If you listen to him, he will lead you into misery and shame such as you can hardly conceive.’

‘Oh, father! then why do you send this bad boy with me?’ asked Paedarion with emotion.

‘That is more than you can as yet understand, my son,’ said the King; ‘but this I can tell you: Hara is not so wholly pernicious, if you and Hatob together keep him in complete control, and instantly drive him with anger from your presence whenever he suggests to you anything which you know to be against my wishes. Thus treated, Hara can do you no harm, but may even help forward the purposes of your education during your few years in the Purple Island.’

‘But if I fail, and if Hara gets too strong for me?’

‘My child, in order that I may do all for my children that can be done, I sent my own IMRAH, the son of my glory, to live and die for them in that far-off Purple Island. You have but to follow his example, to walk in his steps, and all will be well.’

‘And am I to be sent quite away from you, my father?’

‘It depends, my child, upon yourself.’

‘But shall I never see you when I am at the Purple Island?’

‘You will not see me with your bodily eyes, but my spirit will be with you unless you drive him away.’

‘Then you will not leave me alone?’

‘No,’ said the great King. ‘But now, child of my love, farewell. The day will come when I shall summon you home from the Purple Island, and if you have been my faithful son you will then be with me for evermore. I am sending you now to the vessel which will bear you hence across the sea. You will sleep a very deep sleep to-night. To-morrow you will awake in your new home.’

Elyon once more folded his son to his breast and kissed him with a kiss which seemed to bathe his whole being in infinite bliss. He appeared to himself to be sinking through unfathomable waves of slumber and remembered nothing more.

II

How easy to keep free from sin :
How hard that freedom to recall !
For dreadful truth it is that men
Forget the heaven from which they fall.

C. PATMORE.

WHEN Paedarion woke from his slumber, rising as though from the depths of an ocean of darkness and oblivion, he found himself in the midst of conditions utterly different from those of his father's palace. His reminiscences of his early past had grown most dim and dreamlike. He remembered that he was a son of King Elyon ; he remembered that certain duties were incumbent on him ; he possessed the book which had been given him ; on his finger gleamed the deep azure of the sapphire ring. He was conscious, and was often reminded by grave and elderly persons who were the careful protectors of his earlier years in the Purple Island, that there were around him many fatal temptations which he must avoid, and many obligations which at all costs he must fulfil ; and that issues vaster and more far-reaching than he could imagine depended on his resistance to the one and his devotion to the other.

As for the Purple Island he was at first enchanted with it. He loved the green and purple seas which surrounded it with their bright ebb and flow, their murmur and their foam. He was never tired of sitting

or playing beside those musical and iridescent waves. The softly verdant meadows sprinkled with their golden flowers, the great trees with their waving boughs, the sun in the blue heavens with its glories of crimson sunset and rosy dawn, the strong mountains, the sweet and balmy air, the yellow wealth of harvests, the crystal of the running streams, the stars shedding their spiritual lustre through the purple twilight, the innocent mirth and laughter of young voices—the glory, and the wonder, and the power, and dread magnificence of nature delighted him. All was joyous, and ‘the very breeze had mirth in it.’ He saw nothing there, as yet, of hatred or crime, or sorrow or vileness. All seemed to love him ; all were kind to him ; all life was as a sunlit holiday in the blossoming springtide of happy days.

But while he looked with interest on the many of his own race who surrounded him, he was most specially interested in the two boys—Yetser Hara and Yetser Hatob. They were of his own age and were always with him. He was quite unable to recall exactly what King Elyon had said to him about them, yet the essential meaning of the King’s words seemed to dawn upon his soul by instinct. They were also brought back to his memory by the elders who guided his first years in the island, as well as by Hatob, who at every favourable opportunity lovingly tried to engrave them on his inmost soul.

No two boys could be more unlike each other than these two Yetser, as you will see when I describe them.

Hatob was a dark-haired lad of unusual seriousness and calm sweetness of aspect. His eyes, which seemed to shine through those at whom he gazed, were of heaven's deepest azure ; but those who knew him well soon learnt that they could sometimes flash with terrible indignation. The look of sovereign innocence upon



ALL LIFE WAS AS A SUNLIT HOLIDAY

his features would have seemed infinitely attractive had not his face at times assumed an aspect of sternness which seemed to burn into the hearts of those who defied him. But he had a heavenly smile for those on whom he looked with love and approval, and this smile was fairer and more angelical than anything

which can be conceived. And though his voice, when he was obliged to raise it in just anger, had in it a tone as of Sinai's thunder, yet it was ordinarily most penetrating and musical. Indeed it had one very peculiar quality. It often seemed to thrill into the ear and the heart, even when he was far away. Many of the Porphyrians were startled by it as if he had spoken loud and clear; and when they looked round he was not there.

As unlike him as possible was his twin brother, Yetser Hara. There were some who represented him as being in himself, and of his own unchangeable nature, wholly, absolutely, and irredeemably bad; but they were mistaken. There were indeed within him many of the elements of the fiend Ashmod. To those who watched the collapse and catastrophe which he constantly caused to all who gave themselves up to his allurements, he might well seem to be a compound of unmitigated cruelty and wickedness. It was not so. He was the most ruinous of masters over those who yielded to his dominance, the most fatal of guides when he was left undisturbed. Yet when any Porphyrian with the aid of Hatob kept Hara in such subjection that he did not dare to transgress their bidding, Hara was then capable of living in harmony with them both, and, as a slave who dared not transgress, he even contributed to the completeness of the life which kept him bound in reverence and order.

The difficulty was that this control was rarely absolute. People were apt to make concessions to him,

especially when they were young, which made him almost impossible to manage. If you gave him but an inch he would always take an ell. It was not difficult to keep him resolutely in his proper place from the first, but it was a very serious task to dislodge him from any post which he had once been permitted, even for a moment, to usurp. To those who allowed him the smallest semblance of familiarity and independent influence he became in a very short time the most presumptuous of comrades, and finally the most pitiless of tyrants.

The reason why he so often got his way was that, for his own purposes, he could make himself the most winning, caressing, and fascinating of companions. Nothing could exceed the soft insinuation of his flatteries, or the honeyed seductiveness of his inducements. And then he well knew how to assume an air of manly boldness, of attractive liberty, which enhanced his evil but dazzling beauty. For, ugly as was his natural countenance, he could so wreath it in smiles, could fill it so full of magic brightness, that only those who were earnestly on their guard could find it in their hearts to resist his Belial blandishments. And then he had a voice which—in place of its naturally harsh and offensive sound—which was something between a bark and a hiss—could melt into notes so bewitching that, unless his hearers resolutely closed their ears, they found themselves excited into sweet madness, and lapped in a sensuous Elysium.

Many found to their cost that the thrilling songs of

Hara were like those of the sirens which lured the victims who listened to them to shipwreck and death on the bare rocks of bone-strewn isles. When Hara raised his voice to charm the soul of Paedarion, and the boy began, almost against his will, to listen to those songs, the only way to rescue him was for Hatob to sing also. Some said that the voice of Hatob was disagreeable in comparison, and undeniably the tone of it was of a sterner and more Doric manliness than Hara's Lydian and dulcet tones; but then the words of Hatob's songs were so divinely elevating that they seemed to clothe themselves in angelic melodies, and so they became

Not harsh and rugged as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.

Now it cannot be said that Paedarion, the son of King Elyon, was not attracted by Hara. He was very much attracted indeed, and all the more so because Hara laid himself out to win him, to indulge, to gratify, to appeal to all his lowest instincts, to fool him to the top of his bent. Paedarion did not at all like the quiet authority which Hatob assumed over him, kind as it always was. Often when Hatob laid upon him some disagreeable injunction, or with an accent of reproof forbade him some indulgence to which he was strongly inclined—when he called him from his glad games to his hard studies, rebuked his indolent selfishness, or warned him against the dubious companions with whom Hara tried to surround him—the

boy's secret inclination to rebel was always fostered by Hara. Hara gave him many a sly look and secret nudge, and smiled bewitchingly in his face as though to indicate how far happier he would be if he would only shake off the influence of Hatob and join Hara in plunging into every kind of gaiety and pleasure.

It was, however, chiefly when Hatob was absent, or was asleep, or was not well, that Hara put forth the whole force of his seductions, appealing to all Paedarion's worst self. And the boy soon discovered that while Hatob might counsel and reprove, he never could and never would *coerce*. When Hatob found him to be hopelessly wilful and obstinate, he would say to him: 'Paedarion, I cannot use force to you. I am the representative of your father, the King. You know full well that I never say anything which does not agree with the rules which he lays down and the book he gave you. You are living here, as IMRAH, the glory and image of ELYON himself, once lived here, and if you will look to him, and think of him, and walk as he walked, his help will be with you, and his spirit will strengthen you. But you must serve him, and listen to me, of your own free will, not as a machine, and you must yield the allegiance of a son, not the mechanical service of a slave. Tell me, have you never observed that the sapphire ring which your father gave you is by no means of so bright a blue as it ought to be?'

'You are always grumbling at me and abusing me, Hatob,' said Paedarion peevishly. 'There is nothing

the matter with the ring. Perhaps it has got a little dust in it, and it is not so bright as it was ; but look ! it is still blue. I have done nothing so very bad. After all, King Elyon gave Hara to be with me as well as you. He is a most charming friend and companion—I cannot help liking him. He is all smiles : you are all frowns. Soon you will drive me quite away from you.'

'Paedarion,' said Hatob, 'I must do the King's work. It is my duty. If you try to love me, you will find that I am worthy of your love. Let not my dangerous brother persuade you to imagine that I am not your best friend, or that I ever say anything which is not for your highest good.'

'Hara is much more agreeable and attractive than you,' said Paedarion rudely.

'He may seem so,' answered Hatob ; 'but Elyon did not send you to the Purple Island only to please yourself. You have been here long enough already to judge whether selfish pleasure is as noble, or even as happy, as true obedience.'

But Paedarion turned away and sought the company of Hara more and more.

At first, for a very short time, the alliance which he formed with the bad twin seemed to him like a delirious dream. It was so exhilarating to feel himself free to follow his own devices and to walk in the light of his own heart, to be unimpeded by wearisome checks and tiring appeals, and to indulge his lightest fancies and gratify every sense. He exulted, too, in

the society of the gay, dashing, emancipated companions to whom Hara introduced him. 'Let us,' they said, 'enjoy the good things that now are; and let us use the creation with all our soul as youth's possession. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered, and let no flower of the spring pass us by: let there be no meadow which our riot doth not traverse. Let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place, because this is our portion, and our lot is this.'

Yet every now and then in the enchanting cup, though as yet he had only begun to sip it, the boy felt a drop of nauseating bitterness; and when Hatob spoke to him of these new pleasures which once would have been pains, and recalling to him his old pure and noble ideals, spoke to him of his father, and of his radiant brethren in the palace whence he came, Paedarion would bow his head and put his hands to his face to hide the burning blush which in spite of all his efforts began to mantle it in the hue of shame.

'Tell me,' said Hatob, gently laying his hand on the boy's head, 'do you ever think now of Elyon, your royal father, and how he loved you? do you ever read in the book he gave you? do you ever look to Imrah for help? has his spirit ceased to speak to you?'

The boy made no answer.

'Do you not think that you would be growing up nobler, and more happy, and more worthy of your birth, if you shook off these debased companions with whom Hara has surrounded you? What becomes of these a few years hence? Have you never read, have you

never witnessed the calamities which befall them? Paedarion, the comedy is short, but the tragedy is long. King Elyon has heard about you and is deeply grieved. He bears with you; but "when Mercy has played her part in vain, then at last Vengeance leaps upon the stage; she strikes hard strokes, and Pity does not interpose to break the blow."

Paedarion's head was bowed, but he remained still silent.

'Paedarion,' said Hatob, 'have you ceased to love your father?'

'No,' said Paedarion submissively.

'Well, then, if you really love him, you will try to keep his commandments.'

'But sometimes King Elyon seems to be so far away from me.'

'It is the greatest of errors, Paedarion. He is always near those of his children who seek him and love him.'

Such interviews with Hatob were almost invariably interrupted by Hara. He would enter with a cynical smile upon his face, and when Hatob went out, which he usually did at once, Hara would point towards him with a gesture of his thumb over his shoulder, and scornfully ask:

'Well, what has our friend Dull been saying to you?' or 'Are you going to turn saint after this sermon? O no, my dear Paedarion, you are too far gone. Don't be a hypocrite as well. Come, let us enjoy ourselves a little and get the taste of that lecture

out of your mouth.' And the friends and associates with whom Hara had surrounded his victim would look at each other with meaning smiles, followed by yet more assiduous blandishments than before, because they desired to make him wholly their own.

And if Hara ever had reason to think that the gay carelessness of Paedarion had been more than usually disturbed by the noble presence and serious words of Hatob, he had only to raise his voice in those piercing strains by which he so well knew how to fill his soul with ravishment, and Paedarion would come back to him as a bird flutters down into the snare at the fowler's call. The cunning Hara, when left uncontrolled, always asserted a strong tyranny, and used his mastery to produce a new rebel against King Elyon and a new votary of the evil Ashmod. He knew well that the oftener and the more readily Paedarion listened to him, the more helplessly would he listen, till passion became slavery, and wrong-doing—long after it had lost its sweetness—would retain its sway. Experience had taught him how speedily misfeasance passes into habit, and habit into character, and character assuming the guise of unalterable destiny becomes as a prison from which there seems to be no escape.

And so indeed it was. Paedarion more and more forgot all that was good, and often out of mere familiarity continued to do what was evil, though it had lost its initial attractiveness, and though he had felt its allurements to be disappointing from the first. Yet

even then Hara often felt that in the youth's nature there was something intrinsically noble; that, while he held Hara by the hand, he still was siding with Hatob in his heart; and that, in all the perversity of his wanderings, he remained perfectly conscious of the right path. He felt, therefore, that to secure Paedarion for the usurper Ashmod, he would need to put the whole enginery of his temptations into play.

III

So soon the boy a youth, the youth a man,
Eager to run the race his fathers ran.—ROGERS.

BY this time Paedarion's years of education in the Purple Island had passed away, and he assumed the name of Aner. Hara had won over him a too easy victory, but did not feel himself secure in the youth's allegiance. He flung yet more rapturous sweetness into his wild songs, and the burden of them all was that Aner should rejoice in his youth; that he should not waste upon serious duties the sweet season of bud and bloom, but that—fine young fellow as he was—he should eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for Spring would soon pass, and the rest was nothing. A favourite song of Hara's was—

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And the same flower which blooms to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

One day Hatob heard the passionate song with its sweet entrancing lilt, in which Aner joined. 'Yes,' he said, 'Aner; but Hara has omitted to tell you, as he always does omit, that before his roses die their perfume stupefies, and that venomous insects are bred in their soon-withered leaves.'

'Stale morality!' sneered Hara, as Hatob passed away.

It might be so; yet he felt that Aner was not uninfluenced by truths which were so true that he had not yet the courage to declare them false. Hara had been bitterly reproached by Ashmod for having as yet failed to make Aner his open votary. He felt that he must bestir himself.

There were two schemes on which he relied. He would occupy the whole attention of Aner in things not intrinsically harmful, but which might be developed into harmfulness by excess. If he could get him absorbed in these things, Aner would have the less time to think of any others. He would become too busy to secure his deliverance from the ways of the destroyer.

And, secondly, he would leave *no* form of temptation untried, until he discovered the weakest and most susceptible side of Aner's character; or, if he could not entirely enslave him, as he hoped to do, by a single vice, he would do his best to make him the bonds slave of many.

Now Aner was singularly gifted with bright endowments. He won the highest admiration from the other

inhabitants of the Purple Island. He was very beautiful of countenance, tall of stature, strong of limb, swift of foot. His voice, while he was yet a boy, was as the voice of an angel, and when he grew to manhood was so rich and mellow that it delighted every society in which he moved. His intellect was quick and powerful; he easily grasped knowledge, and strongly retained it. His wit was brilliant; his eloquence remarkable; his gaiety contagious. His outward career, therefore, was one of signal prosperity. He was the ideal and the idol of the youths, his companions; they were emulous for his friendship; they intoxicated him with the incense of their often unconscious flattery. As a boy he had won all the laurels he possibly could win, and it had been a common prophecy of him that when he grew up he might attain to almost any position in the Purple Island. When he became a youth he continued a career of unbroken distinction. His early manhood was crowned with successes. Year after year wealth flowed in upon him, and ambition was stimulated by the multiplication of honours. And as his wealth grew, even while he was still a young man, by leaps and bounds, so did his luxury and ostentation. More and more as his riches increased he set his heart upon them; less and less was he honourably scrupulous in the means of their acquisition. He early grew accustomed to lavish his resources upon personal gratifications, and he looked with increasing callousness on the miseries—for round the Purple Island there was many a dim isle of misery—

which he could easily have alleviated. It seemed only too probable that he would degenerate into a vulgar worshipper of money, and belie all the hopeful anticipations which had been formed of him.

But Hatob did not leave him unwarned. One day he came into the luxurious room, where Aner, now immersed in business, was at work with his young secretary. He had been dictating replies to various pitiable appeals for help. He had given the same answer to all of them except one. He was already so rich that, without even the semblance or shadow of any real self-denial, he could have aided every wise agency for good, every deserving case of sorrow and penury. He could, without an effort, have enabled many a blessed institution to continue its work of mercy. But his stereotyped answer to all suggestions for an unselfish and beneficent use of his means had come to be, 'I have so many claims that I cannot afford to help you.' The sole exception which he had made was in answer to the request of a very great man who asked aid in some purely fantastic and useless design. This was granted by Aner with profuse readiness. The great man's favour might be very useful to him in his ambitious schemes. If Aner ever felt a moment's hesitation in considering a case, his secretary, who had been purposely recommended to him by Hara, was always ready with the cold water of cynicism to quench any spark of generous impulse.

Hatob had entered so silently that he had not been noticed ; but directly the secretary had gone out he spoke.

‘Aner,’ he asked, ‘have you quite forgotten me?’

‘No,’ was the short and sullen answer, as Aner averted his gaze.

Hatob, not stopping to notice his ungracious reception, took up some of the letters lying on the table. One was the prospectus of an imaginary gold mine, written with the intention of luring thousands to buy shares. Aner had stated the promised certainty of large profits with eloquent plausibility. He had been paid for his advocacy by an assignment of shares, which, when the rush of purchasers had raised them to fabulous value, he meant to sell, leaving many a deluded victim to suicide and ruin, and plunging widows and orphans in hopeless penury as soon as the bubble burst.

‘Are you not utterly ashamed, Aner?’ asked Hatob in his grave tones. ‘Are you not rich enough, and more than rich enough already, without increasing your gains by these vile means? And has your heart, which was once generous, already grown so cold that you are indifferent to the tears and anguish which your delusive words will cause? You fairly astonish me, and I am utterly ashamed of you.’

‘Silence, Hatob!’ thundered Aner. ‘Do you dare to insinuate that I am a cheat? I feel sure that there is gold in this mine; I merely state its claims as they have been set forth to me.’

‘Lies, Aner, lies!’ was the brief and stern answer. He took up one of the letters after another, read them with an expression of disgust, and then, flinging them down, said:

‘Oh, Aner, you are farther gone than I had feared. Still but young, your heart, if you go on like this, will in time be cold as ice, and hard as the nether mill-stone.’

‘Another word,’ cried Aner, ‘and I will drive you out.’

‘I have spoken, Aner. It is enough. Farewell ; but oh, if you care for your life, and would be saved from destruction, you know that you can always summon me to your help. And before I go I tell you plainly that, for all your wealth, your life is rapidly tending to become a sordid and despicable lie—a lie which even many who are themselves bad men would regard with disdain.’

Aner had braved it out with Hatob, but he instinctively felt that every word which his stern mentor had spoken was true. No sooner had Hatob ended than the young man started up and paced the room. He looked round him at its splendid ornaments, its magnificent works of art. That very morning he had given a large sum for a single picture ; and he had spent nearly as much on a fantastic ornament the day before. Had these objects, he was forced to ask himself, given him one hundredth part of the pure pleasure which he could have derived from that ‘high desire that others should be blessed,’ which, as he knew from earlier experience, ‘savours of heaven’ ? Was it as much worth while to be the proud possessor of a rarity as to have the blessing of those to whom he had been kind ? Angry with himself for once, sickened,

disappointed, pulled up short at the beginning of a despicable career, he summoned back his secretary, and to his cynical astonishment tore up the prospectus which he had written for the mining company, and sent generous aid to those whom he knew to be innocent and suffering. More than this, he made a swift but resolute vow that he would at once combat and subdue the love of money which he already felt to be a root of all kinds of evil in him ; that he would turn with abhorrence from every scheme which had in it even a suspicion of fraudulency ; and that with the money which came to him by honourable labour he would to the utmost of his power do kind and generous deeds. He had repented, and had amended his evil tendency ere it was too late. That evening, as he sat alone, Hatob came in, and affectionately embraced him. In his sweetest tone he spoke words of praise and encouragement, and gave him one of those radiant smiles which Aner had scarcely seen since he was a boy ; and the same night as Aner slept he dreamed that King Elyon himself appeared to him, laid his hand upon his head in blessing, and said, ‘ My son ! ’

But the young secretary was a spy of Hara’s, and, when he reported what had occurred, Hara was thrown into a paroxysm of rage. What if, after all, he should entirely lose his hold on Aner ? what if Hatob should yet prevail, and he should himself feel the heavy hand of his master Ashmod ? This must not be. In trying to ruin Aner by avarice and greed and the love of pelf he had indeed for a time succeeded, but he had evidently

used a wrong snare. Aner's disposition was intrinsically generous. It was clear that he could not be fatally overthrown by a temptation which was not in accordance with his real tendencies. For Aner was naturally kind-hearted, and, whenever he used his resources for the relief of suffering, the gratitude of those whom his generosity had helped made him feel an unwonted happiness. Hara, defeated in the use of a temptation which he had unwisely chosen, felt conscious that he must adopt another plan.

IV

Who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the sun, whose charmed cup
Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a grovelling swine?—MILTON.

‘It was foolish of me to tempt him with the bait of avarice,’ thought Hara to himself, ‘though it catches millions of older, more worldly, and more hardened souls. That net, thanks to Hatob’s interference, is broken, and Aner is delivered. But he shall find, to his cost, that my quiver is full of magic arrows! What shall I try on him next?’

He meditated a little, and then exclaimed, ‘I have it! My friend Comus shall lend me some of

His orient liquor in a crystal glass;

and when Aner has learnt to drain it “with fond intemperate thirst,” I will drive him into the sty of drunkenness.’

Like all highly strung natures, Aner often felt a reaction of lassitude after unwonted exertions. He loved the wine-cup, but had never drunk to excess. From that he had been saved by a certain natural nobleness which made him abhor the lower forms of degradation. In the gay gatherings of his own and Hara's companions he would have been at first so much repelled by the foulness of intoxication, that Hara had taken care to prevent him from feeling this alarmed disgust. But might he not very gradually be seduced into excess, and so, almost before he was aware of it, become the victim of intemperance?

Yes! Little by little Aner grew more fond of wine, and less careful about extreme moderation in its use. At last, when the time seemed ripe, Hara schemed to secure Aner's invitation to a banquet unusually sumptuous—a banquet which it was proposed should be given to him by all the gayest and richest of his associates. It was a congratulatory supper in honour of his recent promotion to a high office which he had won by his abilities at an unusually early age. Hara took care that all the brightest and wittiest young nobles should be invited; that the adornments of the board should be of the most dazzling beauty, the flowers enchantingly fragrant, the viands stimulating and sumptuous, the wines varied, rich, potent, of exquisite bouquet and insidious strength. Health after health was drunk; song after song was sung; a golden loving cup was frequently passed round. The mirth grew warm and tumultuous. 'No heeltaps to-night!' was the general

cry, if any one refrained from emptying his glass. Aner had delighted the company with one of his loveliest songs, and no sooner had he ended it than the most distinguished of the guests, amid rapturous applause, poured out a bumper of sparkling wine, and challenged every one present to fill to the brim the glasses of exquisite workmanship upon the table, and to drain them in honour of him whom they all admired and loved. They did so, and then Aner rose, glass in hand, to thank them.

‘Now, Aner,’ they shouted, ‘you must drink every drop of it as we have done; else we shall think that you despise us and don’t care for us.’

He felt that he was flushed; that his hand shook slightly; that his eyes swam; that his footing was hardly firm; that if he took this rich cup of wine he would have had too much: but, actuated by fear of man and love of popularity, he raised the glass to his lips, and was about to drink it to the dregs, when two incidents occurred.

First, he happened to glance at his hand to see whether its tremulousness was observable, and he noticed that his ring had never seemed to be of a paler blue. The sight filled him with desperation rather than remorse, for the ring had been growing paler year by year, and he seemed to care but little if now its colour was too far gone to be recalled.

Next, at that instant, and for an instant only, a sudden silence fell on the flushed and laughing throng of his companions. He glanced up in astonishment to find

the cause, and saw Hatob approaching him among the rose-crowned revellers. His simple garb showed a marked contrast with their rich apparel, and his look was anxious and stern. The hush which his presence caused was followed by a roar of excited anger.

‘Impudent intruder!’ hissed one.

‘Now we are to have a teetotal lecture “in one weak, washy, everlasting flood,”’ sneered another.

‘O foolishness of men that lend their ears
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,
Praising the lean and sallow abstinence,’

said another.

‘Aner, turn the fellow out!’ shouted several.

‘Begone, Hatob!’ said Hara, rising from his seat in a flame of fury. ‘What business have you here?’ he added, striding out in front of him with threatening gesture.

‘Business which I shall perform,’ said Hatob in a firm voice, ‘and from which, as you well know, you are powerless to hinder me. Stand aside, rebellious servant of Ashmod!’

Hara had raised his arm as though to strike, but he seemed to cower and almost wither away under Hatob’s glance, and his hand fell impotently at his side as he sank back into his seat. Hatob advanced to Aner as he sat in the place of honour, on a richly decorated chair covered with cushions of purple silk. He laid his hand a little roughly on Aner’s shoulder, and said, ‘Aner, beware!’



HE LAID HIS HAND ON ANER'S SHOULDER

The glass was in Aner's hand, and as in a flash of light he seemed to read the words, 'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup; when it goeth down smoothly; at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like a basilisk.' But even while he seemed to see the words burning before him like the mystic letters on Belshazzar's palace-wall, the jeers and jibes of his comrades sounded like a storm in his ears, and a passionate defiance of his better instinct rose in his heated brain. He drained the glass to the bottom, and, while a shout of applause greeted his action, he set it down and dashed the back of his hand with all his force on Hatob's lips.

'Go,' he said, 'my tormentor, and let me see you no more!'

With unmoved dignity Hatob lifted his robe to his bleeding lips. He gave Aner one glance of pity, in which the blue of his eyes seemed to run like fire through the young man's soul; then, turning away, he passed through the riotous banqueters with such a look upon his face as once more awed them into trembling silence.

All the spontaneous hilarity of the banquet was now quenched. The guests broke up into sullen groups. There were few of them who had not taken more than was good for them. Some tottered out at once. Those who stayed, drank on, but idly babbled and quarrelled and could not restore the mirth. Some of them soon rested their heads on the tables and fell into heavy

slumber. Others were carried home. Aner, half stupefied, sat breathing stertorously with his head sunk upon his breast. Hara—looking at him with diabolical satisfaction, and hissing under his breath, ‘Now you are mine for ever’—signed to Aner’s servant to take him home.

Aner woke the next morning in shame and sickness, feeling that he had publicly disgraced himself. His sight was dull; his eyes were red; his head was aching. Hara assiduously exerted himself to counteract his depression. He laughed over the occurrences of yesterday. He said that a carouse on a joyous occasion involved no discredit whatever, and did no one any harm. He tried to charm away Aner’s gloom. He told him, once and for ever, to get rid of the fetish-worship of ridiculous scruples. He spoke of Hatob’s warning as

but the lees
And settlings of a melancholy blood.

He jocularly suggested that Aner would feel quite well again by taking a hair of the dog that bit him.

It only took a few days for the full tide of life to flow back into its normal channels. Aner’s wealth was still growing; success and honours still flowed on him. But he found that it was not granted him to give himself up to sin for one short hour, and then to be quite happy. His career involved anxieties. He was often in low spirits. When they seemed inclined to master him, he could for the time dispel them by the charmed cup. At such times it always seemed to

him as if some tempting spirit offered him wine as a potent nepenthe, and whispered :

But this will cure all straight ; one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirit in delight,
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise and taste !

Slowly, but very surely, he felt the ugly liking for this mechanical stimulus and this dangerous sedative growing upon him, dimming his faculties, blunting his keen perceptions, confusing his intellect, gradually inflaming his features and palsyng his strength. There were times when, though he was still surrounded with envy and admiration for his gifts, his wealth, his position, he began utterly to despise himself. And he knew that the remedy to which he was tempted to resort only aggravated the radical disease ; when he sought relief in wine he did but precipitate the inevitable reaction. The penalty trod more and more swiftly upon the heels of the sin ; and the yet more enervated lassitude, and the yet more unspeakable depression from which he now constantly suffered, were as fiery goads which drove him on to still grosser and more irremediable excess.

V

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler :
The snare is broken, and we are delivered.—*Ps. cxxiv. 7.*

AND now Hara thought that he had him safely ; that he had bound him in fetters of adamant, and shut him

up in a prison without iron bars. He thought that by this time he could throw off the mask and needed not to show himself in the guise of a flatterer or a benefactor any longer. He might now assume the attitude of an insolent and irresistible despot, who would make his tyranny felt and acknowledged, and who had no longer need to simulate the smallest pity or affection, or to leave to his victim the paltry and passing lure of present prosperity.

It had always been a part of Hara's plan to put Aner into the close proximity of those who would tempt and foster every weaker or baser element of his disposition. Nearly all of Aner's household were of Hara's choosing, and his servant had secret instructions to keep his glass abundantly replenished at his meals, and to see that potent drinks were always ready to his hand.

Aner had come in, vexed and wearied, from the heat of political strife in which he had been engaged. He felt inclined to ask whether the game was worth the candle; whether the honour and influence to be attained could ever reward him for the labour, anxiety, and turmoil. He was specially disgusted because, that day, a bitter and scurrilous opponent had garnished his speech with many sneers and personal innuendoes in which he had spoken of Aner's 'intemperance.' He used the word ostensibly in one sense, but had quite obviously meant it to be understood in another. Now Aner had taken the utmost pains to disguise his failing and temptation, and he flattered himself that he had

succeeded. What if it were otherwise? What if Rumour were already clacking against him with her ten thousand tongues? What if the very abjects could henceforth mouth at him, and his fellow-drunkards make songs upon him? And—all of a sudden he noticed that his ring was absolutely colourless. It had been a deep-hued sapphire, now it looked like a dull and common white crystal. It reminded him of thoughts which had long been utter strangers to his soul. Was he not, after all, a son of King Elyon? Had he altogether forfeited the privileges of his royal birth? Youth was gone like a dream. His beauty was impaired; his strength was diminishing. Death would come soon, and then—what comes hereafter.

While these thoughts were chasing each other through his brain his butler summoned him to his dinner. That day he happened to be alone.

‘I see that you are tired, sir,’ said the servant insinuatingly. ‘A glass of wine will refresh you.’

Refresh him? He wondered whether the man knew how frightful at that moment was the imperious craving for wine which he felt gnawing like a viper at his heart. This was the time at which he usually indulged his propensity. But there was something in the glance of the servant which displeased him. Was the man in league with Hara against him for his ruin?

Seating himself at the table he summoned the whole fortitude of his will, and said:

‘Take this wine away. Remove those glasses; I will only take water this evening.’

‘Water?’ said the man with open-eyed astonishment and disdain.

‘Water!’ answered Aner, almost fiercely. ‘Did I not speak plainly enough? Obey my orders!’

The butler slowly removed the cup and the wine from the place where they stood just in front of Aner, but he only removed them a little way and eyed his master with curious looks as he marked the total failure of his appetite, and the suffering caused him by the absence of his usual stimulant.

‘Oh, sir,’ he at last ventured to say, ‘you are not enjoying your dinner at all. Do just take this little glass of wine. It will do you so much good.’ And he poured out a sparkling foaming glass, of which the delicate fragrance filled the room.

Even this agent of Hara did not know how fearfully the impulse to succumb acted on the perverted senses of his master; but Aner’s pride rose in revolt at being tempted to what he knew was degradation by his own servant. After an instant’s struggle to master himself, he seized the glass, hurled it against the wall, and, in a voice which rang with passion, ordered the man to leave the room.

‘Ah! he will drink like a fish the moment my back is turned,’ thought the man; ‘but it is time that Hara should know of this. And if he takes to drinking water my place won’t be worth having.’

The servant slipped out and told Hara that he thought Aner must be unwell, for he seemed much disturbed, and would only drink water at dinner.

‘Ah!’ said Hara, ‘I will pay him a visit.’

He found Aner in a condition absolutely pitiable. His nerves were in a state of violent irritation, and as he madly, despairingly, struggled with himself and tried to shake off the strangling load of his temptation, he trembled piteously, and was reduced to a condition almost abject.

‘What is the matter with you?’ said Hara insolently, for he had long laid aside his courteous and seductive manner. ‘What is the meaning of all this nonsense? Why do you make yourself ill? Take your wine like a man. Who do you suppose will care two straws whether you drink or not?’

Aner looked up at him. Hara’s expression was now the one which was natural to him. The sham Belial-beauty in which he had known how to disguise his true appearance in earlier years was gone. Aner felt a spasm of feeble wonder as to how he could ever have found any fascination in this odious, leering, blighted wretch. He had smitten Hatob—the good, the noble Hatob—in the face; could he not spurn this demon-visaged tempter out of his presence?

Alas! he felt helpless, paralysed. He could not rise from his seat.

‘Come, you poor fool,’ said Hara; ‘as if you could resist! A secret drunkard like you may shed maudlin tears over himself, but you know very well that if I put a full wine-cup there on the table, and between you and it burned up the nether fires, you would still stretch out your hand and take it. Drink it, slave!’

he thundered out, as Aner still sat in trembling silence.

Aner groaned deeply within himself. He felt the terrible truth of Hara's words ; but had he indeed sunk so low ?

'Hara,' he muttered, 'you are a very demon, and I loathe you.'

'Demon or no demon,' said Hara with a fiendish laugh, 'I will have you know that now I am your master.' He rose and poured out the wine and put it close by Aner's hand, that its fragrance might overpower his senses. 'Drink that, slave !' he said again, fiercely stamping his foot, 'or it will be the worse for you. You cannot help yourself.'

It seemed as if the agonising struggle was over, for, in spite of the sense of loathing in his heart, Aner stretched forth his hand for the cup with the heart-broken cry, 'It is true ; I cannot help myself.'

And, as he did so, raising his eyes for a moment, he caught sight of one of the splendid works of art with which his room was adorned. It was a marble statue of Imrah, son of King Elyon, in kingly robes, in kingly attitude. In his left hand lay the open book, as though to say, 'This do, and thou shalt live ;' and his right hand was uplifted, not to repel but to invite, not to threaten but to bless. Around him twined the lily of purity, the rose of holy joy, the vine with its clusters of purple fruitfulness. Crouching as the willing pedestal of his feet, with arched backs, were the lion and the young lion. Crushed into the dust beneath

were the basilisk and the adder, and underneath was inscribed on black marble in golden letters, 'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet.' But what struck Aner most was that in the kingly eyes there seemed to be an expression of infinite tenderness, of infinite compassion.

Hara followed the glance of his eyes and was enraged. 'What has all that to do with you, slave and wretch?' he said; and, striding up to the statue, he tore it from its place and flung it violently upon the ground. 'Now,' he said, 'leave Imrah to the saints. He has nothing to do with you, nor you with him. That is all over long ago. Come; you see that struggle is useless. Take the good wine; get rid of this morbid folly and be happy.'

Again Aner seemed as if he were convulsed to his inmost soul. He felt the utter abjectness of being a slave to a dead thing; but the fatal force of habit pressed on him like a vice and past sin seemed to have frozen into impotence all his powers of resistance. Was not the struggle useless, as Hara had said? Why should he thus agonise, when, sooner or later, he must be swept away by the drowning current? Again he stretched out his hand to the wine with a gesture of despair. As he did so he saw the wicked leer on the face of Hara:—but he saw something else.

On the wall over Hara's head hung another work of art—a priceless picture. Again it represented Imrah, the deliverer of the Purple Island. Over the white

vesture, which symbolised his innocence, fell the gold-embroidered folds of his priestly robe, adorned with its jewelled Urim. On his long and flowing locks was a golden crown, in the radiants of which was twined a crown of thorns, such as the rebels of Ashmod had made him wear; but now the thorns had blossomed into flowers. From his left hand, fastened by a golden chain, hung a lamp, of which the overpowering brightness fell on the closed door at which he was knocking. But the door had been long unused, and over its rusted stanchions the ivy crept and clung. A bat, creature of the darkness, disturbed by his knock, was flitting away, and from within came no answering gleam. Thick beside the base of the door towered the huge withered stalks of a dead hemlock, once gay in vivid green, now an emblem of chill venom and extinct desires. Underneath the picture was written, 'Open the door unto him that knocks.' And once more to Aner's fascinated gaze it seemed as if the sad eyes glowed with an inward light, and that the light was full of pardon, and help, and love.

In an instant he withdrew his hand from the wine-cup; he beat his breast; he fell upon his knees. Forgotten memories came back to him; his eyes were filled with tears of penitence; and raising heavenwards his clasped hands, his streaming eyes, he cried:

'Oh, Elyon, I am thy son! O Imrah, help me!'

As though in instant answer to his prayer, the door of the room swung open and some one entered. It

was Hatob—still beautiful, still noble. He looked weak and very ill; but what a contrast between that pale face of peace and holiness, and the tainted features of Hara! What a difference between those deep-blue eyes and the wicked, surreptitious, ferret glances of the other, full of unhallowed and malignant fires!

‘Oh, Hatob,’ moaned Aner, still upon his knees and with bent head, ‘my brother, my more than brother, have you still pity for a wretch like me? Can you forgive the insult of my cruel blow?’

Hatob gently raised Aner’s tear-stained features, in which few could have recognised more than the wreck of Paedarion’s early beauty, so deeply had evil passions left their furrows there.

‘Look at me, Aner,’ he said; ‘do I look as if I had not forgiven, as though I did not love you? Even when you cried aloud just now I heard the voice of Imrah send me to you.’

‘Oh, Hatob, would that I had never deserted you! Can I ever be snatched from these fetters of my slavery, of which the iron seems to have eaten into my soul? Oh, Hatob, save me from him!’ he cried, pointing to Hara, who was glaring upon him so fiercely that he might have seemed to be Ashmod’s self.

‘Depart, Hara!’ said Hatob, whose whole frame seemed to dilate with majesty as he spoke. ‘What? dare you linger? Have you never had to shrink and howl ere now under Elyon’s scourge of fire? Go, or my own hand shall drag you to your prison!’

‘He is mine and I will have him yet,’ hissed Hara;

but Hatob looked at him, and with a curse of baffled malice he turned and fled.

‘Aner,’ said Hatob, ‘deliverance is yet *possible* to you, but I should deceive you were I to say that it is *easy*. There is a law which rivets sin to its consequences by a link of adamant. It would have been immeasurably more easy for you never to have fallen into this bondage than now to escape from it. Yet there is one way, if you have resolution to embrace it, which can save you out of this *one* sin, even if it be so as by fire. Never again must you so much as taste the wine-cup. If you do, the demon which lurks in it for *you* will leap upon you with tenfold force. He has his clutch upon your hair. Only by this resolution can you shake him off. Dismiss your bad servant; banish from your house that which for you is poison and is death.’

‘I will,’ murmured Aner, ‘if I can.’

‘If you will, you can,’ answered Hatob. ‘Pledge yourself even now in Elyon’s name, with the help of Imrah and his unseen Spirit, that the wine which you have abused to your own destruction shall touch your lips no more.’

‘I vow,’ said Aner; ‘so help me Heaven! I blush for, I loathe my servitude.’

‘There is always help for those that need and seek it. I can help you in one small way by recommending to you a thoroughly honest and faithful servant. His name is Xenios, and you may trust him implicitly. But you must rely mainly upon yourself. Rally all the

best powers of your nature. Entreat for aid from above and you will be safe. Remember! Watch!’

He lifted a warning hand, he blessed him, he departed. And when he had gone, Aner sank once more upon his knees and vowed his vow.

VI

If the roots be left, the grass will grow again.—*Chinese Proverb.*

ANER had now reached middle age. He had for some years resolutely kept the vow which he had taken. Wine was never seen at his table. He had gained immeasurably and in every way by his voluntary abstinence. The rumours about his weakness had died away. His body had recovered much of its old vigour, his mind its normal clearness, his countenance its noble expression. And now the highest guerdons of ambition seemed to be easily within his grasp.

Again Hara felt himself foiled. Aner had great force of natural character. He had felt so utterly humiliated by the shameful bondage of intemperance that by sheer resolution it might have seemed—but in reality by the aid of the unseen Spirit whose help he had implored—he had burst the gates of brass and smitten the bars of iron in sunder.

Indignant at the loss of so fine a votary, Ashmod—who was rarely seen, but was known to lurk in dark places of the Purple Island, and had many a secret

shrine, where his followers burnt to him their unhallowed incense—summoned Hara to his presence.

‘You have managed very badly, Hara,’ said the terrible Prince. ‘You will lose the indulgences I offered you. Aner might have been my most promising subject, and would have won many others to me. You should have studied his nature better.’

‘Hard and thankless master!’ snarled the crestfallen Hara. ‘I tried him with gold and I succeeded.’

‘Only for a very short time. It is the meanest natures only which are caught by that glittering and useless bane. Aner is not mean, and you might have known that he would soon get tired of such a fool’s bauble, fit only for dotards and old women.’

‘I subdued him, body and soul, to the ghoul of drink for some years. But for accident, and but for that accursed Hatob, I should have had him. I do not despair of winning him back even yet.’

‘Drink may be a subsidiary help,’ said Ashmod; ‘but there are natures too lofty to accept its degrading servitude.’

‘It has ruined many a strong man,’ said Hara sullenly.

‘It will fail with Aner,’ said Ashmod; ‘but try him now with Lilith, the demon of the noonday—the demon of perverted love. Many have fallen by her wounds quite late in life; some even in old age. I am not satisfied with you, Hara; but do not despair. We have many resources at our disposal; we shall have him yet.’

VII

Sin startles a man—that is the first step; then it becomes pleasing; then easy; then delightful; then frequent; then he is impenitent; then obstinate.—JEREMY TAYLOR.

At quam cæcus inest vitiis amor ! omne futurum
Despicitur, suadentque brevem præsentia fructum.

CLAUDIAN, *Eutrop.* ii. 50.

ANER, having for some time broken the violence of the temptation which was destroying him, and deeming himself now secure from it, had greatly relaxed his vigilance. He was trying to content himself with such things as the Purple Island could give. The Porphyrians looked on him as the most successful of men. There seemed to be nothing lacking to his happiness except the home-life into which he had never entered. He had remained unmarried. He had not been attracted by the many maidens who would have felt themselves enchanted by alliance with him. All other possessions which men account as boons seemed to be at his disposal. His magnificent residence was rich in works of art. His parks and gardens were the loveliest and sweetest which the island could show. His woods teemed with the wild life of nature; his streams were famous for their fish. His aspect was strikingly noble, his manners full of charm, his friends numerous. Honour had showered all her stars upon him; criticism was now silent; he was highly

appreciated ; he stood upon the topmost steps of power and influence. And yet he had to confess to himself that he was far from happy. These passing treasures, even at their best and fullest, could not satisfy the heart of a son of Elyon. 'They seemed to crumble into ashes at every touch. They had looked like ambrosial fruit until he could freely take of them, and then they became Dead Sea apples, filling his mouth with dust and bitterness. In his far-off boyish years, before he had entered into the drearier parts of the wilderness, the visions of such things as he now possessed had looked like an enchanting mirage—soft oases of happy verdure and palms and crystal waters ; he had reached them with weary feet, and lo ! he saw nothing around him but barren acres of stony wilderness, and dreary wastes of sun-encrimsoned sand.

There was nothing more to gain. Riches ? he did not know what to do with what he had ; and though he now gave away largely ; yet, as there was no personal contact or personal sympathy of tenderness in his giving, his charity became mechanical, and the thanks which he received sounded hollow. Splendour ? rich carpets, and tapestries dyed with purple of the sea, glowing pictures and gilded corridors palled upon him. The works of art had become nothing but pieces of furniture which had no longer any fascination, at which indeed he rarely looked. There over the fireplace in his favourite room hung the picture of Imrah, which had arrested his attention at a crisis of his life ; but now he scarcely ever glanced at

an object so familiar. A stream cannot rise higher than its fountain, and Aner, living on the low levels of worldliness, scarcely even by mechanical habit raised his heart to the true source of his being. He saw the days pass by him in long procession ; he felt that the lack of high spiritual discernment had made him snatch only at their most worthless gifts, and as they departed in silence he

Under their solemn fillets saw the scorn.

In the estimation of the Porphyrians his character was now quite unexceptionable. 'What a great man Aner is !' deferentially murmured all the youths. 'And what a good man too !' said their elders. 'Look at his charities ! See how punctually he performs his religious duties ! Even calumny would blush to tell tales of him.'

And in truth Aner did not neglect the public forms of religion, in so far as they consisted in external functions, though to one or two of his most intimate friends he confessed that he found these functions distressingly dreary, and that sermons were a great trial to an intellectual man. Aner was trusting in his own heart ; and if he had not ceased to read the book which his father Elyon had given him, he would have found there that 'he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool.'

Hatob had not been near him for a long time, and Hara, who was narrowly watching him, yet kept out of his way. He was indeed glad to see that Aner's

love to his father Elyon had dwindled to a dim convention and a hollow externalism, but he was determined to secure him as an avowed votary of Ashmod.

Aner was seated in the great window of his town-palace, which was surrounded by a lovely pleasance full of flowers. Two boys, of whom one was carrying to him his daily correspondence, were coming down the path, and were indulging the spontaneous exuberance of their mirth in constant antics, with bursts of laughter and snatches of song.

‘Those lads,’ thought Aner, ‘are only sons of my humblest dependents, and they are far happier than I am. The remembrance of youth is a sigh.’

One of his gardeners was hard at work watering and tending the flowers, and whistling a merry tune.

‘Light-hearted wretch!’ thought Aner, recalling the line of a poet,

He whistles as he goes
For want of thought,

He little fancies that the renowned Aner would gladly change places with him!’

Then he saw a young mother leading her little white-haired child by one hand, while in the other she was carrying ‘father’ his breakfast. The labourer kissed his wife, and then he snatched up the little boy in his arms, and pressed his rosy cheeks against his own, and puffed out his own cheeks for the chubby hands to push, and ran his rough fingers through the short sunny curls, murmuring endearing words to the little fellow all the while. Aner sighed. ‘What is all I

possess,' he said, 'to the joy of that man's home? Why have I never made myself a home? This is not a home; it is a gorgeous prison.' And then he murmured to himself:

'There's nothing in the world can make me joy;
Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.

Yes, the old epitome is right—we are born weeping; we live unhappy; we die disappointed.'

Hara had concealed himself among the thick flowering shrubs, hard by the windows. 'Aner is weary of everything,' he said to himself. 'He will soon be ripe for the demon of the noonday.'

He waited till evening, when, after the day's routine of business, Aner returned to the desolate magnificence of his abode. Then Hara visited him—not like the Hara whom he had last seen, but a gay, courteous, smiling, handsome man of the world.

'Aner, my old friend,' he said, 'I am afraid that when last I saw you we did not part on good terms. You were in an excitable mood, and perhaps I was inconsiderate. May I dine with you this evening? And if you will allow me I will introduce to you my friend Iollas—a man of fine taste; we might have a pleasant evening.'

Aner, his thoughts still under the shadow, welcomed the diversion, and he ordered for the use of his guests the wines which now he never touched.

'What? do you still drink that ridiculous water, Aner?' said Hara. 'That is why you are so moody.'

I am quite against excess ; I delight in moderation ; but I am sure a few glasses of good wine never did any one any harm.'

'Thanks,' said Aner, 'I have not the least desire for it, and feel much better without it.'

'But at least,' said Iollas, 'you will take a glass with us to-day, if only for the sake of good fellowship, and that you may not seem to be passing upon us a silent censure.'

'If you wish it,' said Aner, oblivious for the moment of his vow. 'I am now in no danger of its influence,' he added to himself.

He filled a glass, and drank to these pleasant gentlemen. Instantly the old passion leapt on him again—'terrible, and with a tiger's leaps'—and he took another glass and yet another, and began to feel the rich intoxicant flowing like lava through all his veins.

But it was not Hara's immediate object to startle him by a relapse into his old failing, and when dinner was over he proposed that they should all go and see a celebrated dancer named Phaedra, whose sprightliness and beauty, and poetry of rhythmic motion, were at that time the common theme of the Porphyrians.

'Oh, do,' said Iollas ; 'Phaedra's loveliness penetrates the heart like a sunbeam. She is the most radiant girl I ever saw. Nestor himself might have fallen in love with her.'

'I do not go to see public dancers,' said Aner.

'Oh, I forgot,' said Iollas, with a slightly veiled

sneer. 'Of course you are a personage in the religious world.'

'There is a subtle taint about these dancing-halls,' said Aner, offended; 'and the persons who frequent them are not at all to my taste.'

'This will never do,' thought Hara. 'Aner is getting nettled, and Iollas will spoil all.'

'You forget,' he said, 'that Aner is a man of exquisite culture, and distinction, and refinement. But really, Aner, Phaedra is quite exceptional, and there is not the least harm in her exhibition.'

'A man of my position is too much stared at, and gives rise to idle talk if he goes to vulgar places of amusement,' said Aner, still displeased.

'I agree with you,' answered Hara; 'but a man of your position ought to know something at first hand about the people, their dissipations, and their way of life. Why should you not come with us incognito? In five minutes I could so disguise you that you would not be recognisable by your dearest friend.'

'Do come,' said Iollas; 'it would be delightful.'

It was strange, but at that moment Aner thought he heard the voice of Hatob. It seemed to be uttered in the lowest whisper, yet it thrilled through him, and it said, 'They know most of evil who know it least.'

Aner yielded, though unwillingly. A large cloak, a wig, a false moustache, a few other touches which Hara skilfully added, changed his aspect so completely that he hardly knew himself. They drove to the hall; and when they were there Hara whispered that, to

avoid notice, they must do like the rest and order wine. He took care that it should be of the best, and Aner, uneasy in his present surroundings, took of it freely.

Phaedra glided upon the stage amid deafening greetings and showers of roses. She was young; she was undeniably lovely. Her long, perfumed hair floated in waves over her shoulders; her eyes were large and deep and lustrous, with long dark eyelashes; her cheek was glowing; her dress was light and gleamed with jewels; her every movement in its subtle grace was like voluptuous music. Perhaps under other conditions Aner might have merely looked on with cold curiosity, or even with displeasure. But now the wine had inflamed his senses, and the light and the warmth, and the novelty and the excitement added irresistible potency to the spell of the sorceress. He fixed upon her his burning gaze; no step, no motion was lost upon him; and, was he mistaken, or did this fairy vision more than once turn her eyes upon him and answer his passionate and ardent gaze?

He was not at all mistaken. Hara had schooled Phaedra well.

‘How enchantingly lovely!’ murmured Aner almost to himself; but Hara overheard him, and laughed in his heart. When the dance was over, he said, ‘I know Phaedra a little; would you like me to introduce you to her?’

‘I should like nothing better,’ said Aner. ‘Is she as good as she is beautiful?’

‘Oh, quite!’ answered Iollas, concealing with

difficulty the sardonic smile which it tortured his lips to suppress.

They went into a luxurious boudoir behind the stage, and Phaedra, who had a brother with her—or so she called him—whom she introduced by the name of Eutrapelos, received them, though she was still dressed in her jewelled gauze, with the most charming modesty and the sweetest decorum. She knew Iollas well, but concealed the fact, and spoke to Hara as a child might speak to an elderly friend for whom it does not much care. It was Aner whom she smote with her most cunning witchery, and dazzled with her most magical smiles. She was perfectly aware who he was, for Hara had told her ; but she carefully concealed her knowledge, and addressed all her remarks as to a casual traveller, not to a great leader of the Porphyrian people. Phaedra was one of those sorceress women of the class to which Queen Cleopatra belonged. Her beauty had in it the same maddening spell as that of her who dragged so many kings and heroes to their ruin. Aner was the last of the visitors to bid her good-bye, for Hara had managed that the others should precede him through the narrow passage. As soon as Hara dropped her hand, Aner seized it, and imprinted on it an impassioned kiss. Hara pretended not to notice it, but he could scarcely control the convulsively malignant amusement which it caused him. That night he went to the secret shrine of Ashmod to report progress, and the two yelled aloud with laughter, till ghosts and dark shadows, and grim fiends and ghastly spectres were disturbed,

and began to flit like vampires about the unhallowed roofs.

But when Aner was gone, Phaedra turned to her 'brother'—as it was convenient to call him—and cried with shrill merriment, 'Good heavens! what a conquest! who would have imagined that the distinguished, the eminent, the respectable Aner could be so caught? This is serious, Eutrapelos. It means nothing less than marriage. An illustrious destiny is before you and me!'

'Hem!' said Eutrapelos enigmatically. 'There are marriages and there are marriages!'

VIII

Βασκανία γὰρ φαυλότητος ἀμυροῖ τὰ καλὰ.— *Wisdom*, iv. 12.

WITHIN a few months thereafter it was publicly announced to the amazed Porphyrians that a marriage was arranged between the beautiful Phaedra, whom all the world admired, and Aner, one of their most illustrious statesmen. Even Ashmod's votaries were astonished. This was indeed bewitchment! Phaedra might hereafter become a very Lilith or Naama. They repeated the announcement to each other with meaning smiles. The faithful subjects of King Elyon were grieved and scandalised. Phaedra had played her part with a skill as marvellous as her dancing. She had passed herself off as an ingenuous maiden of good birth, left an orphan, compelled against her will to support

herself by the public display of that poetry of motion which was an inborn gift, and living a quiet and virtuous life under the guardianship of her good brother Eutrapelos. And as for Aner, trusting vainly in his own strength, never looking upwards, forgetting all that was best in the past, he had fallen a hopeless victim to the demon of the noonday. He was infatuated by the fascination of a bad woman. His feeling for her bore no resemblance to holy love.

Hatob could do but little, for Aner sedulously avoided him. Sometimes indeed Aner fancied that he heard in the inmost caverns of his heart the haunting of a voice which warned and troubled him ; and once when Phaedra had been with him, there came to him, involuntarily, that thrilling whisper, simply recalling to him the words of the neglected and forgotten book which his father had given him :

‘ With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strikes through his liver ; as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life.’

He was quite unable to prevent the words forcing themselves upon him ; but then he seemed to hear Hara sneering, ‘ Obsolete Pharisaism ! ’

But the voice *would* continue, and it said, ‘ Harken unto me, therefore, O my children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart incline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath

cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is in the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.'

At that moment Hara was announced, and poured out a torrent of felicitations to Aner on the good news that he had won such a gifted, such a lovely bride. 'Why, Aner,' he said, 'all the young men are dying with envy of you. They were in crowds at the virtuous Phaedra's feet, and she has shown her calm good sense by rejecting every one of them, and choosing you.'

The crisis seemed to Hatob so terribly serious that he felt it his duty to interfere. But perhaps his visit was ill-timed. Phaedra, bewitchingly attired, was seated on a rich footstool at Aner's feet. His hand was on her dark locks, enwreathed with gems; her liquid eyes were upraised to his own. He had been talking over with her the date to be fixed for the bridal day, and all her replies were low, and soft, and sweet.

It was then that Hatob entered. Phaedra did not feel in the smallest degree embarrassed, but Aner was.

'Let me introduce to you my future bride,' he said to Hatob in a constrained voice.

'Did you know her as she is, as all but yourself know her to be, she could never be your bride,' said Hatob gravely. 'You think yourself wise, but you have been egregiously befooled.'

Phaedra leapt to her feet and uttered a cry. 'Protect me, Aner,' she said, 'from this calumniator.'

‘Inquire for yourself, Aner,’ said Hatob quietly. ‘Mistake not an intoxicating and unhallowed frenzy for a pure and blameless love.’



ANER AND PHAEDRA

But Aner's blood 'was' up and he would not listen. 'Leave me,' he cried, 'tormentor, I hate you! For the second time I bid you let me never see your face again.'

‘One word before I leave you for ever,’ said Hatob, ‘unless your own will summons me. This word——’

‘Not one word,’ said Aner ; and as Hatob seemed still about to speak, he seized him by the hair, and would have hurled him out of the room ; but suddenly he caught sight of the sapphire ring, which, after having for a time resumed a certain tinge of lustre, had again blanched to a deathful white. Sensible, by past experience, how solemn was the warning, he felt a shock of agony strike through his nerves.

Hatob only turned on him a look of the deepest pity. ‘Farewell, Aner,’ he said, without a touch of resentment. ‘A fool must eat of the fruit of his own ways, and be filled with his own devices.’

IX

The wandering of concupiscence doth undermine the simple mind.

Wisdom, iv. 12.

SOME time had passed. At first Aner lived as in a delirium of self-deceit. An enchanted dream seemed to wave over his head its wild and fragrant wings.

Ere six months were spent the dream had ended in ghastly disenchantment. The rustling masquerade was over ; the dread reality began.

He saw Phaedra as she was—beautiful, but partly by artificial aid ; intriguing ; rapacious ; mean, touchy, indescribably commonplace ; habitually untruthful ;

domineering ; not to be trusted for a moment ; wholly without intellect, or care for anything intellectual ; immensely extravagant ; panting for outrageous adulation ; without a particle of real love for him ; devoted, heart and soul, to any one who would burn at her shrine the thickest fumes of flattery, the one incense which she most loved. And it was to this powdered and painted phantom, whose very hair was dyed, that he had, in infatuated passion, impawned his life.

She cared in reality for no being in the world except the handsome Eutrapelos, who, as Aner now discovered by accident, was *not* her brother at all. Aner sternly forbade him, on peril of his life, ever to set foot in the house again ; yet he was tormented by the suspicion that he visited her in secret.

Every day Phaedra showed herself more plainly in her native ugliness—as no longer a siren but a vulgar vixen. She displayed the unutterable odiousness and worthlessness of a character which was nothing but a shallow veneer of surface qualities—an assumed charm and simplicity of manner which was but the coloured film over depths of putrescent stagnancy.

The passion of her life was to win fresh adorers, by once more exhibiting her charms and her dancing on the public stage, under the glare of lamplight. Aner prohibited this with such sternness that she saw it would be impossible. She therefore indemnified herself by giving banquets, preposterously sumptuous, to her crowds of admirers. At these, when Aner was absent, she privately exhibited the dances, which, so far from

seeming beautiful to her husband, now sickened him with disgust at their artificial and voluptuous sameness.

And this was the creature to whom the demon of the noonday had now linked him by indissoluble ties !

At first he had tried to awaken her dormant soul—to find if she could be aroused by any topic of human interest. But at once he stood appalled by the depths of an ignorance which, apart from experience, he would have deemed impossible. When he first detected her subterfuges, her ill-concealed passions, her mean intrigues, he tried expostulation. He might as well have tried to make a rock fruitful by sprinkling it with dew-drops. He began to see that she could only be truly described as earthly, sensual, devilish. When she sailed down in splendid array to the silly and odious circle of male and female admirers with whom she filled his house, she always chose the evening light, which would not betray that her naturally pale cheeks were painted with cinnabar, her eyes artificially brightened with antimony, and her eyelids tinged with henna. When Aner saw her in this guise, she seemed to him barely human. He was filled with a revulsion of loathing not to be expressed.

And, misled by unbridled passion, he had actually wedded this woman to help him to get rid of weariness and loneliness, and thinking that thus he would have a home !

Many a shameful and terrible scene took place between them. They were always ended on her part by fits of violence from which he had to protect himself, or

by floods of vituperation mingled with words which made him shudder, and by a succession of piercing screams, which, to his intense disgust, caused curious spectators to linger outside the house. Strange tales began to be afloat about the brutality which Aner was asserted to exercise towards that charmer, his lovely and longsuffering wife !

The house of Aner became a pandemonium of hopeless wretchedness. The fires of hell were burning upon his hearth.

At least, however—if it were impossible to awaken her to any sense of shame, or to discover in her any decent human quality—at least he determined to stop her in the mad career of squandering, which threatened, if unchecked, to exhaust even *his* wealth, and to reduce him to pauperism. At the morning meal they now used to meet with no greeting, and never looked at each other without an expression of intense mutual aversion, mixed on both sides with vague fear. One day, as soon as the meal was over, she rose to sweep out of the room to the boudoir on which, though it was ugly with the worst incongruousness, she had exhausted the powers of luxury. But Aner bade her stay. He was in a white heat of scorn and indignation.

‘Woman !’ he said.

‘Woman !’ she repeated with a scream ; ‘how dare you so address me ?’

‘Would you have me call you wife ?’ he said, in a voice which rang with scorn ; ‘even the title “woman” is dishonoured by being applied to you.’

She snatched a silver ornament from the table, and hurled it at him, as she had flung such missiles before. It missed him, and with one stride forward he seized her by the two wrists, and, holding her as in a vice, while she trembled at the fury which blazed in his eyes, 'Woman,' he said, 'the debts you have already contracted are pouring in upon me. That necklace of diamonds which you paraded last night round your neck, those earrings which hung down your painted cheeks——'

If a look could have killed Aner, surely her glance would here have struck him dead, as she struggled to set herself free; but he continued—'Those ornaments alone cost as much as a king's ransom. Your other extravagances, equally tasteless and monstrous, would, if continued, bring me before the year is over to utter ruin. This must cease. I have privately sent round to every leading merchant in this part of the Purple Island that no order you give is to be attended to. From this day I take the management of the household out of your hands. I have ordered your horses and carriages to be sold. I have had all the jewels, except those which in my original folly I gave you, sent back or sold. You shall give no more banquets in this house. You shall turn over an entirely new leaf, or, at all costs, I will procure a separation from you.'

For a moment the blood seemed to congeal in Phaedra's veins, and she grew pale as death. Then, recovering herself, she unpacked her evil heart in such curses and such vile terms as Aner had never heard.

She rent the house with screams of diabolical rage and disappointment ; lastly, she snatched a knife from the table and aimed a blow with it at Aner's face. Though latterly he had always been on his guard when speaking to her, he had barely time to dash her arm aside ; but she inflicted a gash upon his cheek.

The many servants of the house, attracted by her screams, had been witnesses of this odious scene, and now some of her female attendants took hold of her and hurried her out of the room. Aner stood there, his wounded cheek streaming with blood, humiliated beyond words to utter.

For the next week he never saw her. She was shut up in her room, but not a day passed which did not bring him fresh shocks of shame and disaster. The worst was a letter from his colleagues in the Porphyrian Government regretting that, in spite of their high estimate of his abilities, they regarded his marriage as so discreditable, and the scandals which had begun to attach themselves to his name as so flagrant, that, with great regret, they were compelled to request his resignation of his high office. He was thus suddenly and disgracefully hurled down from distinction into insignificance.

The servants gossiped ; the scandals spread. The successful always find intensely bitter critics in the malignant.

It is the penalty of being great,
Still to be aimed at.

Like all public men, Aner had hosts of envious and

unscrupulous enemies who felt a fiendish satisfaction in bespattering his name with mud. In every organ of news Aner saw himself held up to ridicule or execration. If he ventured into the streets, his acquaintances shunned him, or refused to notice his presence. The secretary of every club to which he belonged sent him a letter saying that a special club-meeting had been summoned, and he had been expelled from membership. The most monstrous misrepresentations about him were everywhere rife and everywhere believed. His fair-weather friends fell from him as leaves fall from a tree in winter. It seemed as if past envy left him no single defender. He did not know how to dissipate these calumnies; he scarcely even cared to do so. And, as a last drop in this thunderstorm of sudden calamities, he heard that one of the great undertakings in which his fortune was invested had unexpectedly collapsed, and that he was only left with a wreck and fraction of his former wealth. Crushed and stupefied by the storm of misfortune, in which financial as well as social ruin were but items, he seemed in his despair to be sinking to the very depths. Too much stunned for consecutive thought—smitten and pierced through and through by

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune—

in the apparent hopelessness and finality of his ruin, he turned once more to the old resource of strong drink. He had broken his vow; of what consequence was it if he broke it again? Of what consequence was

anything? Let death come; whatever it was it must, he thought, be better than such a life as this. The resource of suicide was often present to his mind. His friends seemed to have deserted him unanimously, and he sought no grace, no help. Though sunk to the depths, he would not look up.

But something must be done; the future must be arranged for; his affairs must be settled. It happened that his physician, a good and tender-hearted man, hearing the rumour that he was in evil case, visited him. He found him seriously ill, ordered him change of air, and offered to place him under the care of a good and able young student, who would accompany him to the seaside as a companion. Xenios, the steward whom Hatob had recommended to him, and for whom Aner had acquired a strong feeling of respect and affection, would nurse him in his present weakness, and, above all, would see that he touched no strong drink.

X

Di boni quam male est extra legem viventibus! quod meruerunt, semper expectant.—PETRONIUS.

BUT, as though he were not already sufficiently ruined body and soul, Hara was anxious to destroy him utterly by goading him to seek revenge. While he was slowly gaining strength and the composure of despair amid the sea breezes, and was summoning his best faculties to meet the new conditions of his life, Hara managed

that a letter, addressed to Phaëdra, should, by the intentional misdirection of an emissary in his service, be conveyed to the hands of Aner. He recognised the handwriting of Eutrapelos, and, tearing it open, found that it contained a proposal to Phaëdra to fly with him in secret to some far-off place, after she had robbed the house of Aner of every available precious thing which had been left from the shipwreck of his fortunes.

Jealousy and indignation at this crowning act of treachery determined Aner to hurry back to his house unannounced and at once. At his door he saw a beautiful little child of about four years old, playing among the flowers. He did not stop to notice him, though he felt a vague passing wonder who he was. He rushed in and searched for Phaëdra in vain from room to room. At last he bethought him of a distant room in one of the turrets, in which he had amused himself by placing a collection of the arms of every age and nation. He entered, and there, seated on a divan, was Eutrapelos, while Phaëdra's arms were round his neck.

The young man was startled out of his usual self-possession by the sudden interruption. He sprang to his feet.

'Phaëdra is my wife,' he cried, in his disturbed alarm, as though to defend himself for having been seen with her.

'Your wife!' exclaimed Aner with fierce indignation.

‘She was my wife when you first saw her; the little boy you must have seen outside your door is our son.’

‘Then I am not married at all,’ said Aner. ‘Oh, deadly and thrice-accursed villain!’ He advanced with the deliberate purpose of avenging his wrongs on Eutrapelos, whose lies and deeply dyed treachery had had no small share in accomplishing his ruin. The concentrated force of his indignation seemed to give him an unnatural calm. He strode to the door, turned the key in the lock, and put it in his robe. Then, taking down two swords which were crossed on the wall, he flung one of them at the feet of Eutrapelos and said: ‘Here and now we fight till one of us falls.’

Eutrapelos did not wish to fight, but he had no choice. An actor by profession, he had been trained in the use of weapons.

‘Do not fight!’ screamed Phaedra; but the two were in such deadly earnest that they did not hear her, and, feeling her impotence, she could only shriek and wring her hands.

It was clear from the first that the skill of Eutrapelos was thwarted by his sense of guilt, and that Aner’s awful indignation made him irresistible. Before long, by a dexterous turn of his arm, Aner had whirled the sword of Eutrapelos out of his grasp and lunged at him. Phaedra realised his danger, and, since Eutrapelos was the only being she had ever loved, she rushed between them in the endeavour to protect him. The result was inevitable. Aner had

no power to stay his arm. The thrust intended for Eutrapelos in fair fight pierced her and she fell.

There was a horror-stricken pause. Eutrapelos raised her in his arms, and laid her motionless on the divan:

‘You have killed her!’ he cried, and with a spasm of fresh fury, in which his eyes seemed to be starting out of his head, he seized his lost sword and rushed on Aner with mad impetuosity. Aner had barely time to spring back, and the fight began again. Eutrapelos was worsted. As Aner pressed upon him he slipped and fell. In a moment the foot of his outraged adversary was on his breast and his sword-point at his heart.

Then came to Aner the thrilling whisper, the flash of burning letters, which he always associated with the presence of Hatob. ‘Forgive your enemy’ were the words he seemed to hear, and the letters of fire which burned upon his brain were, ‘Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’

He stayed his arm; he removed his foot from the breast of his prostrate foe. ‘Go,’ he said, ‘I give you your life;’ and, taking the key from his robe, he unlocked the door.

‘Murderer!’ hissed Eutrapelos. ‘For this your head shall fall on the scaffold.’

He turned and fled. Aner walked to the divan where Phaedra lay with the life-blood ebbing from her wound. He tried to stanch it; then he struck a blow on a great gong, and Xenios came, the faithful steward whom Hatob had chosen, whose advice and help were always wise and good.

‘Attend to her,’ he said, pointing to Phaedra. ‘Send at once for a physician ; send also for a minister of justice. It was my sword which pierced her, though it was by accident.’

Xenios summoned Phaedra’s attendants. Silent, astonished, full of dreadful surmises, they lifted her apparently lifeless form, and carried her to her room. Aner, his head resting on his hands, lost in anguish and horror, sat motionless, awaiting the summons of justice.

Two archers of the government came and arrested him. He was led to prison.

In a few days his trial followed. The judge told him that circumstances looked very black against him. Phaedra had been wounded ; she still lay speechless ; her life was despaired of. It was known that he was on the worst terms with her, and that their quarrels had been frequent and violent. He had been found alone in the room where she fell, his sword wet with blood. There was no evidence produced in favour of what he asserted about the fight and the accident. Evidence less damning had brought many a man to the scaffold. ‘Alas !’ added the compassionate judge, ‘who would have dreamed that the brilliant, the famous Aner, one of the leaders of the state, would ever have been reduced by his vices and passions to a position so disgraceful, so deplorable ? But the man who deliberately takes his first bad step soon finds that his path is on the edge of a precipice, where to stop still is impossible, to retreat is ruin, to advance is destruction. Justice

walks with leaden feet, but she strikes with a hand of iron, and her stroke is death.' ¹

Aner, too stricken and too hopeless to plead his own cause, had instructed an advocate simply to tell his unvarnished tale. He disdained to use either argument or appeal. If his destiny were to be averted, it should be by the simple truth; and if he were condemned, what could death be except a merciful release to one so wretched?

'Have you any witnesses to produce?' asked the judge. 'If your story be true, surely Eutrapelos could be found; and at least some one must have seen him enter or leave your house.'

None spoke; none pleaded for him; then Xenios rose and asked for a remand. 'There was reason to believe,' he said, 'that Eutrapelos had escaped to a distant part of the Purple Island.'

A month's remand was granted, and Aner spent it in the dreary prison cell. Then the trial was resumed. It was proved that Eutrapelos, accompanied by a child, had fled—proved also that he had carried with him gold and jewels from the house of Aner—but he had not been traced. And since it was unquestioned that Phaedra's wound had been inflicted by the sword of Aner, it seemed inevitable that justice should be left to take its course.

Amid an awful hush the judge had assumed the black cap, and was about to pass sentence of death on

¹ These words were actually addressed by an eminent judge to a well-known criminal.

Aner, when there was a stir at the door of the court and the wasted form of a woman was carried in on a litter.

‘Who is this?’ asked the judge.

‘It is Phaedra,’ answered Xenios, ‘who is called the wife of Aner, but was in reality the wife of Eutrapelos. She has something to say.’

The couch was carried between the judge’s chair and the dock of the prisoner. ‘What have you to say?’ asked the judge compassionately.

She raised her wan hand, and, pointing to Aner, said, amid breathless silence, in a voice scarcely audible:

‘He has told the truth. He is innocent. I have terribly wronged him. I ran in between them. He did not mean to hurt me. I could not die till I had told the truth respecting the man against whom I have sinned so fearfully.’

When she had said this she fainted away and was carried out. That night she died.

The judge consulted his assessors. The intercepted letter which Eutrapelos had written to Phaedra was produced; other slightly confirmatory evidence was brought forward. Letters were handed into court which Phaedra had given to Xenios, proving that Eutrapelos had promised to be with her in the armoury at the time when Aner had surprised them, and had arranged with her to strip the house of every portable treasure and to fly with their child.

Aner was acquitted and discharged from prison.

For days he had not uttered a word. He stepped forth a ruined, blighted, haunted man.

The faithful Xenios conducted him to the house which it would now have been an irony to call his home. As he entered the hall he summoned up energy enough to say, 'Xenios, I have lost all. Sell this house and grounds; sell all my pictures and works of art; pay all my servants and discharge my debts. When this is done, let me know; enough may still be over to support the remainder of my wretched life in deep seclusion.'

'Despair not, dear master,' said Xenios. 'Hatob bade me be faithful to you, and I will. You have been a kind master to us all. I will not leave you in your misfortunes. Pardon me if I dare to say that you need some one to watch over you.'

'I know what you mean, Xenios; but I shall be far too poor to pay your wages.'

'Think not of it, sir,' said Xenios. 'I have enough.'

Aner was touched even to tears. 'Is there,' he thought, 'is there, after all, such a thing in the Purple Island as one disinterested friend? What have all my mouth-friends done for me? Which of them has helped me? Which of the old gay companions of my youth showed anything but a cruel rejoicing over my fall? Which of my many flatterers held out a hand to help me? Ah, me! ah, me! Why did Elyon make such a miserable and worthless race? Oh, Hatob! Hatob!'

Scarcely had he uttered the cry when Hatob came.

‘My Aner,’ he said, ‘my Aner! Oh, I am glad that you have summoned me again.’

Aner could not speak; he could not even look at Hatob; he averted his head, while the tears coursed each other down his furrowed face.

‘Have I ever misled you, Aner?’ he asked. ‘Has not all happened as the King Elyon warned you that it would? What have you gained by giving your heart to Hara? Has he bestowed upon you a single blessing? Has he in one thing showed himself a friend?’

Aner shook his head.

‘All is lies,’ he murmured, ‘all is treachery, all illusion, all wretchedness.’

‘Not all,’ said Hatob. ‘When Imrah came to the Purple Island to deliver you and King Elyon’s other sons, you know what they made him suffer. But did he despair? And was his life of love less radiant, less lovely, less real? What has reduced you to this depth of misery?’

‘It is the bitter fruit of those things of which I am now ashamed, Hatob,’ said Aner; ‘but, though I am ashamed of them, their poison is in all my veins. I shall go on weakly sinning and half repenting; loathing what I am, yet continuing to be what I am; loathing what I do, yet continuing to do what I loathe, till death ends my misery, or begins one yet more awful. Oh, let me curse the hour which called me into existence!’

Hatob spoke not, yet it was as if he spoke, for Aner saw glowing before him the words, ‘Lift up thine eyes to the hills, whence cometh thy help.’ But Hatob

let Aner's heart go sorrowing through all the guilty past :—from such shame might spring holy sorrow and determined resolution.

‘Oh, Aner,’ he said at last, ‘I send the faithful Xenios with you to watch over you, lest you should again relapse into drunkenness. He can guard your habits ; only Elyon can guard, only Imrah heal, only their spirit intercede for your heart. Hope lasts while life lasts. You have read what the poet says :

Man, what is this ? and why art thou despairing ?
God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.’

XI

He would have spoke,
But hiss for hiss returned with forkèd tongue
To forkèd tongue.—MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, x. 536.

HARA again visited at midnight the secret grove of Ashmod. Hara was gnashing his teeth with vexation, and Ashmod was in a savage mood.

‘What are we to do now ?’ asked Hara. ‘Again and again from the verge of destruction Aner is snatched from us. I should not wonder if he escaped after all.’

‘There is yet a chance for our hatred and revenge,’ said Ashmod. ‘He is wounded already, deeply wounded. We will track him down ; he shall not escape us.’

‘I tried the imps Flattery and Softness on his youth,’ said Hara, ‘and they perverted him ; I tried the plausible fiends of Gold and Glitter on his early man-

hood and he was entangled by them; I tried the evil ghoul of Drink and he hopelessly succumbed; then we agreed to try Lilith, the demon of the noonday, and she fettered him, and he seemed to be ours, body and soul. When she failed, I suddenly turned the fierce spirit Revenge upon him; but he forgave his enemy. All our emissaries have more or less succeeded, yet he has at the last shaken them off. He has been desperately wounded in the house of these his friends, yet at this last moment, after all, Hatob is beside him and the spirit of Imrah, our worst enemy, is wrestling with him to deliver him from me and from his lower self. Had we not better give him up and hunt other game?’

‘I never give up any Porphyrian till he dies,’ said Ashmod; ‘warfare with me has no discharge.’

‘Have you an arrow left unbroken in your quiver? have you yet a demon whom he cannot conquer? The others, all but the drink-ghoul, have given him up; and from him, as you know, there is an easy protection which he has tried before, and probably will again.’

‘I have one potent fiend more,’ said Ashmod.

‘Male, or female this time?’ asked Hara.

‘Female.’

‘Her name?’

‘Akedia, the spirit of moping melancholy and utter weariness of life.’

Hara clapped his hands. ‘I know her; she frequents the tombs of the lost. She is death in life. Her home is in the waste places, fertile in sorrow. She lives in darkness which may be felt. She fills houses

with the sound of ghostly footfalls which approach at midnight. She can summon spectre after spectre, gaunt and grey, to stare on haunted men with hollow eyes. She can become a fury, scattering dust and ashes over the blighted garden of human lives. She is own sister to Mania, and at last, in many an instance, hands over her victims to her brother, the demon of Suicide;—and then we triumph.'

'Yes,' said Ashmod, 'and never was a soul more ready to be her prey than that of Aner. In any case it is something that we have made him grieve the heart of Imrah, and have marred the plans of our enemy Elyon.'

He had scarcely spoken when thunder crashed over the dark grove. A thunderbolt smote from its pedestal and shattered on the black marble floor a monstrous idol. With a yell Ashmod leapt quaking from his throne, while Hara crouched down and hid himself from the intolerable blaze behind the fragments of the idol, and in that fierce illumination he saw demons clinging together in their fright. The grim temple was filled with sulphurous fumes, and the fiends trembled lest another bolt from heaven should bury them in its ruins.

But Ashmod soon recovered from his terror; and next morning Akedia glided forth, robed in tattered and dismal grey, to hide herself in Aner's dwelling and fill it with gibbering ghosts. She glided in unseen, but as she entered he felt a deadly chill congeal his heart.



AKEDIA GLIDED FORTH

XII

Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and dissolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not placed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter.—*Hamlet*, Act i. Sc. 2.

ANER had turned his back upon the world of ingratitude and disappointment, of mocking illusions and hollow hopes. He had chosen for his abode a cottage upon the lovely shore of the Purple Island, near a humble fishing village called Klydon. Except Xenios, no one was with him. His riches had made themselves wings and flown away. His mental gifts, devoted mainly to self-interest, had produced little that was not futile. His fame had vanished like the gleams of a meteor in the darkness. He had found that 'smoke and lukewarm water' was the perfection of friendships based only on the lowest affinities. His pleasures had been as the fragrance of a fruit whose taste is poison, the glitter of a serpent whose sting is death. He had worshipped the idol, self, and now 'the dead idol stretched out its withered hand to a miserable worshipper who had nothing more to give.'

He gave himself up to misery. He could not rouse himself to seek the grace which could alone redeem the useless perversion of his life. The thoughts of King Elyon had been dimmed within him almost to obliteration. Xenios had purposely saved from the dispersion of his pictures one which represented Imrah, as the Good Shepherd, seated wearily in the stony wilderness

whither he had followed a young strayed lamb. The Fair Shepherd had taken it in his arms, and was nourishing it in his bosom, and underneath was written :

I did all this for thee :
What wilt thou do for me ?

Aner looked at it sometimes, for it was beautiful as a work of art ; but if it suggested anything to him, he put the thought away. Everything seemed to him too late. The fatal shadows of his past sins walked with him like evil angels. He had reached 'that most disastrous page in the volume of life on which is inscribed the words, "Gratified desires."' All that followed was first disenchantment, then ruin, and now a ghastly blank. His youth had vanished like morning dew, and he was possessing its iniquities. His beauty had consumed away, like a moth fretting a garment. He had often regarded as commonplace the age-long cries of human satiety and human disappointment. Now he felt their meaning with all the agonising intensity of personal experience. To *him* Time was

a maniac scattering dust,
And Life a fury slinging flame.

He knew now that life which once looked so full of meaning and blessedness could become no better than

A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

He had books—but of what use was it any longer to read ? what could books bring him ? Much reading

became to him but a weariness of the flesh. He had no employment, no aim in life. He had no friends except Xénios, who, though true and kind, could not share his thoughts. He seemed to have sunk out of life before his time. Of what use was life? of what use was anything? He was haunted by memories, and the sense of enormous loss. Akedia was getting possession of him, heart and soul. The whole philosophy of life's experience seemed to him to be summed up in the cry of thrice-doubled emptiness -- 'Vanity of vanities,' saith the Preacher, 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

If he could have plucked up courage to summon Hatob to his side for counsel and consultation, all might have been well; but had he not struck Hatob? had he not cursed him, and driven him from his presence? would Hatob care for the withered leaves of so dead a flower as his friendship now? And how could he call for help to King Elyon? If he was King Elyon's son, had not Elyon long ago despised and rejected him? would he not spurn him from his presence as a disowned and disinherited rebel, fit only for Ashmod's den? If he had offered to his high Father, as a flower in the bud, his early years, *that* would have been an acceptable sacrifice; but who could care for the gift of flaccid leaves and broken stalks? Alas! do not

Lilies that fester smell more rank than weeds?

Yet Hatob did not really desert him. The flash, the whisper, which betokened Hatob's care for him,

came to him again and again. It was Hatob's hand alone which seemed to pluck him back from the edge of the precipice. It was Hatob who, amid his musings of despair, suggested to him the possibility of hope by recalling to his mind at one time such a thought as

‘O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help;’

and, at another,

‘If any man sin, it shall be forgiven him.’

But if, for a moment, the letters gleamed before his imagination, too soon the waves of a sea of darkness seemed to overflow them, and the roar of its devouring billows drowned the still small voice. The ocean shore which was the favourite scene of his lonely wanderings tended to deepen his melancholy. The broad waste of wandering foam with its ebb and flow, its meaningless unending murmur, its illimitable and briny barrenness, the aimless and endless plashing of its ineffectual surge—was it not an emblem of his futile life?

And now Akedia had so thoroughly succeeded in making all the uses of the world seem to Aner to be weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable, that Hara was eagerly awaiting his final success. When Akedia's task was ended, she would hand over Aner to her brother, the fiend of Suicide, and the Purple Island would know him no more. So Hara visited him; pretended to condole with him; heard, and echoed, and heightened all his complaints, that his life was a dreary and useless burden. Then in a tone of

hypocritical sympathy, painting all things even worse than they were, Hara threw out hints about death, which he described as a peace which could never more be broken, a calm refuge, a stormless haven, a dreamless and eternal sleep.

And just as Hatob often tried to influence Aner's mind by mentally emphasising to him all the best and noblest truths which he had ever read, which he carried in his retentive memory, so Hara had a way of making such lines as these ring in his brain :

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream ;
I worse than lose the years which are my all :
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Thus, over and over again, Aner was tempted to self-murder. How could he go on enduring—week after week, month after month—these futile yesterdays and wearisome to-morrows? Of what use was it for him, or for any one else, to groan every morning, 'Would God it were evening!' and every evening, 'Would God it were morning!' The watchful solicitude of Xenios had prevented him from taking refuge in drink, and so striving 'to steep his senses in forgetfulness;' but now Xenios had constantly to watch him lest he should seek opportunities for suicide. He carefully moved out of Aner's way everything which might tempt him to a dangerous onslaught upon his own existence.

But one day when Aner was aimlessly turning out the contents of some old boxes, filled with the relics of

his sold possessions, he found something which might have fetched a price, but had been accidentally overlooked. It was a dagger with fine point, double-edged ; its handle set with jewels. Xenios evidently did not know that it was there. Aner positively clutched at it and hid it in his robe.

And now the dagger constantly appealed to him ; floated before his eyes in his sleeplessness ; shone before him at night as with a supernatural glitter ; seemed to offer its jewels to his hand when he felt it beneath his dress where he always wore it. It became like a thing alive ; there seemed to be something devilish in its fascination. The Evil One was upon him ! He would struggle no longer ; he would end it all !

He wandered away along the desolate shore. The village of Klydon, near which was his cottage, did not number more than a thousand inhabitants. They were all peasants, for the most part poor fishing people. He rarely walked in that direction. He preferred the sand-dunes with their bright green shrubs, and the yellow sands, and the great rocks and caverns. Often in stormy weather he would watch the billows lashing themselves upon the rocks of the headlands, and falling back baffled in sheets of spray, only to come wildly leaping up once more, to be again shattered by the same fate. Were they not an emblem of man's defeated life—at any rate of his own ? Did they not furnish a living picture of

the strife

Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny ?

And those ever-hungry sea-birds which waved their white wings above the crawling ripples beyond, was not their plaintive cry like an unceasing dirge, wailed over the salt unplumbed sea of life ?

Sometimes, when Aner desired to be if possible more lonely still, he would plunge into one of the wild glens down which mountain streams forced their rock-impeded course to the sea, where the cormorants built their nests, and over which, in search of prey, the eagles poised themselves on seemingly motionless pinions, or sailed in majestic slowness through the azure air.

Into one of these glens he wandered on this oppressive afternoon, thinking in his heart that it would be a fitting scene for the deed he meditated. He said to himself that in so rarely visited a nook his body might lie undiscovered for days, till the ravens had picked out the eyes, and the gorged vultures had flapped heavily away from the torn flesh, and the wolves and the wild dogs ceased to snarl over the white bones.

Again the flash, the thrill, the whisper ! If there was one thing about which Aner had prided himself more than another, it was that he was a brave man ; but now the words gleamed before him, and the voice whispered to him :

When all the blandishments from life are gone,
The coward slinks to death, the brave live on.

It was in vain ! ‘Barren verbiage,’ he exclaimed to himself ; ‘unprofitable morality. It may do for the

innocent and the happy. What can it mean for me ? What profit is there in a doomed and bootless life ?

‘Why need it be bootless ?’ flashed the question. ‘Because,’ he answered to himself, ‘its gifts have all been squandered, its opportunities all thrown to the winds, its beauty is consumed away in the sepulchre out of his dwelling. All over my life has been written the doom, “self-destroyed.” I cannot face this misery any longer. If death be but a change from monotonous anguish, let the irrevocable come.’

He was on the point of accomplishing his fell purpose, when a youth, who had been fishing in the upper reaches of the stream, passed by him, touched his cap and bade him ‘good-day.’

It was but a momentary interruption. ‘He bade me good-day,’ said Aner to himself ; ‘it is an utterly evil day for me.’ And he murmured to himself the lines :

‘What is good for a bootless “bene” ?’

The forester to the lady said.

And she made answer, ‘Endless sorrow,’

For she knew that her son was dead.

‘Yes, she knew that her only son was dead, and I know that for me every conceivable hope is dead and buried under unfathomable seas.’

He waited till the youth’s figure had disappeared among the windings of the glen, and then resumed his interrupted purpose.

He drew out the dagger from the folds of his robe. The sun flashed on it ; the light ran and played about the jewels of the hilt ; it looked lovely to him ; he

kissed it. And Hara's words came back to him as though Hara himself had said them in his ear : ' Death is a calm refuge, a stormless haven, a dreamless and eternal sleep.'

He raised the dagger in the air ; it flamed before him in the sunlight ; one instant more, it should be buried in his heart, and all would be over. He did not fear the force or certainty of his own strong stroke.

And even at the moment when his arm was raised to strike, and his destiny trembled in the balance, and Ashmod and Hara were watching him from a cavern hard by with a fiendish leer upon their faces—even at that moment he was startled by a cry of terror.

Xenios had two children : one, a boy of ten years old, named Krates, a brave, adventurous little fellow, who feared nothing ; the other, named Philos, a lovely child of six. Aner had often noticed them playing at no great distance from him on the shore, sometimes alone, sometimes with other comrades. But, though he had always been fond of children, he had never shown any kindness to them. This disinclination to take the least notice of his little boys was a cause of disappointment to their father, who hoped that their mirth and innocent prattle might sometimes have cheered his master's moody thoughts. Aner, however, had thought to himself, ' I have nothing in common with children now. Why should my soiled unhappy life be like a clouding blight on the blossom of their young days ? They would instinctively shun me ; I should but quench their laughter and spoil their games.'

The children, however, in their adventurous rambles often liked to be near Aner. They felt a man's presence to be a protection to them amid possible and unknown perils; and their father and mother rather encouraged them to run and play in the direction he had taken, as it made them feel less anxiety in case the children should fall into any danger.

The little boys never obtruded themselves on the notice of the sad and solitary wanderer; but this day also they had followed his steps unobserved, and had been delighted to see him turn into the glen, which—since wild creatures were said sometimes to haunt its caverns—had for them a certain glamour of fearful mystery, such as they would not have dared to face alone.

Though he did not know it, they had been within a stone's throw of him when he had flashed his dagger in the sun. Strolling hand in hand behind him, unheard, unnoticed, they had entered a cave hard by, to look for the crimson and purple sea-anemones which gleamed like flowers round its still pools. But they had only advanced a few steps into its entrance when they saw the green eyes of a wolf glaring through the darkness. They turned and fled with screams of terror; and the gaunt grey wolf, whose midday slumber had been disturbed by the sound of their voices, first lazily shook himself, then showed his white teeth and snarled, then made a bound towards them. There was a huge rock by the cave's mouth, behind which they ran to hide themselves; but the wolf came sniffing round it—and it

was at this moment that they raised the second cry of fear, startlingly close to him, which had arrested the uplifted dagger of Aner.

A glance showed him the situation, and showed him further that, without assistance, one of those fair children could hardly fail to fall a victim to the monster's teeth.

The shout which he raised seemed to him both involuntary and of quite preternatural strength. It arrested and frightened the wolf; and Aner, stooping to the ground, hurled at it a mass of rock which lay at his feet; and again seemed to himself to have hurled it with strange force and certainty of aim. It smote the wolf on the head, and brought him half-stunned to the earth. Then Aner—his dagger ready to his grasp—sprang forward, and with a rush reached the creature's prostrate body, which was still convulsed with fierce spasms. The dagger gleamed in the hot sunlight, and then was dimmed in the wolf's blood, as Aner with strong thrusts pierced it again and again, till it gave one last spasm and was dead.

The rescue took but one or two moments, and the boys watched it as if magnetised. When they saw that the wolf was dead, the younger child flew to Aner, flung his little arms round his neck, kissed him again and again, and lisped, 'You a good man! you a dear man! you saved us from the horrid wolf.'

'But you had a very narrow escape, my child,' said Aner; and, moved by the child's gratitude, and the touch of the soft little hands upon his neck, and the

sweet rosy cheek against his own, he felt the tears course each other down his face.

‘Don’t cry ! don’t cry !’ said the child, still caressing him. ‘We safe now ; you a good man, a dear man !’

The elder boy came to him more shyly, but took his hand, and looked up into his eyes and thanked him. ‘But for you, sir,’ he said, ‘the wolf would have killed us both.’ The boy looked at the monster’s hideous carcase and shuddered. ‘May we come home with you ?’ he asked.

‘Do, my boy,’ said Aner, for he saw that the children were still in a state of terror from their recent danger.

‘And will you carry me ?’ said the little boy.

Aner, surprised at himself, took up the little prattler on his arm, while the elder brother held his other hand.

From the door of the cottage the wife of Xenios saw them coming along the sands.

‘Xenios,’ she cried, ‘look !’

‘What is it ?’ said Xenios, ‘an earthquake or an eclipse ?’

‘Only look !’ said his wife ; and when Xenios saw Aner with the arms of one rosy child round his neck, and leading the other by the hand, he was no less glad and astonished than his wife—the more so because the oppressed and solitary man seemed to be in animated conversation with both of his young companions.

Aner felt a little embarrassed when he saw the

parents watching this unexpected development ; but when the children caught sight of them Krates ran forward, and little Philos wanted to be put down to tell them the wonderful news. The story of the wolf was narrated in a perfect rush of words by both the children, and the father and mother thanked Aner with a transport of gratitude.

‘Will you take my dagger, Xenios, and clean it for me?’ said Aner. ‘It is red and clotted with the wolf’s blood ; and—I think, Xenios—you had better keep it for me.’

‘I will, sir,’ said Xenios gravely. ‘I did not know that you possessed it, but you have made noble use of it.’

‘I found it a week or two ago,’ said Aner, in a rather guilty and conscious tone ; ‘but I don’t want it.’ He left the happy parents and the happy boys, and—preserved from a yet worse danger than they—he flung himself face downwards on the ground to deplore with tears of shame and penitence his purpose of self-murder, and to give thanks that he had been permitted to do a blessed deed.

And when he slept he dreamed that his radiant brethren from Elyon’s palace tuned for him their golden harps, and sang their brightest melodies ; and that Imrah himself looked gently down on him, and said in a voice of benediction :

‘Aner, live for others !’

XIII

A MAN WHO LIVED FOR MEN

My own hope is a sun shall pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;
That after last returns the first,
Though a wide compass round be stretched ;
That what began best can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once prove accurst.—BROWNING.

NEXT morning little Philos came into his room, climbed upon his bed, and kissed him. And when he came down, nothing would content the children but that he should promise in the afternoon to have a game of play with them. They had summoned their little comrades from the village and insisted on his re-enacting the whole adventure of the wolf. The biggest boy in the school was to act the wolf, and Aner with imaginary fierceness had to stun him with an invisible stone, and despatch him with an imaginary dagger. Then he had to tell them stories, and devise games for them, and join in their games ; and the tender winning arts of Philos and the other little ones softened and brightened him, and charmed away his sullen wrath and melancholy. Gradually he grew to love them all as though they were his own children, and to consider all their interests. Seeing their many disadvantages and limitations, he longed to elevate and brighten their poor little lives ; and it happened

to him at this time that he received an unexpected increment from the wreck of his fortunes, which placed means at his command.

Akedia stole back discomfited to the shrine of Ashmod. As she left the threshold Aner felt his heart grow sensibly more warm.

‘Why are you leaving him?’ asked Hara, who met the grey spectre as she slunk through the twilight.

‘He is surrounded by merry and innocent children,’ she answered. ‘My chance is gone.’

Step by step Aner became absorbed in the endeavour to help the village children. He built them a school and a gymnasium. He paid an excellent teacher to give them wise and healthful education for their minds, and a young athlete to train their bodies. He next founded for them a humble technical school in which they were taught the elements of arts and crafts;—so that in a very few years the boys and girls of this village became famed for their usefulness and good training, and obtained employment in the Purple Island far more readily than they would otherwise have done.

One day a little fellow took him to see his sick father. Aner not only helped and comforted the suffering fisherman, but, using the skill and information he possessed, hastened his complete recovery. He won such a reputation for wisdom that the poor population began to consult him for all their needs. He became the helper, the adviser, the physician, the arbiter of the villagers. He was constantly studying their

happiness. He procured for them seeds and flowers, and fruit trees, and encouraged them to sow and plant, until the seaside village became famous for its fertile orchards and redolent with blossoming gardens. He had a sheltered harbour built for them, so well planned that it became available for miles along the rockbound coast and saved the fishermen from many a peril of the sea. When the ear heard him it blessed him, and when the eye saw him it gave witness to him.

But, while all were grateful to him, it was always with the children that he continued to be the prime favourite, and they were nearest and dearest to his heart. During the time which these works occupied he was very happy—far happier than he had ever been before. The words of Imrah, ‘*Aner! live for others!*’ acted on him as a perpetual incentive and encouragement. He was amazed to find how deep was the blessedness of doing good. He had become cynical about human nature in former days, and had come to the conclusion that there was in the world no disinterestedness, no gratitude. But now he found it quite otherwise. The best qualities of those around him expanded into fragrance as a flower unfolds its bloom to the summer sunlight. Not a boy or girl in Klydon who did not love him. The children welcomed his presence with a shout of joy whenever he came among them. They seemed to be weaving round his heart the fresh garlands of their young gladness. And now, to his great joy, Hatob was constantly with him, truest of

his counsellors, dearest of his friends ; and Hara rarely came near him, though sometimes he saw his disfigured face scowl upon him from a distance. Once or twice when Hara visited him with cynical sneers and disparaging suggestions, calling his life 'provincial and commonplace and goody-good,' and trying to tempt him back to the world and to Ashmod, Aner would break away from him and call for Hatob, or would secretly entreat Elyon to send him help ;—and then Hara always turned away and left him.

And he felt one new source of infinite help and comfort in the fact that the sapphire ring, which for many a long day had been of a deathful white, now began to glow once more—faintly at first, but with ever-increasing brightness—with the blue of heaven.

His benefactions had now been so wise, so large, and so eminently helpful, that with the aid of what he had recovered from his wealth he had completely uplifted into prosperity the fortunes of the village. The chief inhabitants combined in a plan to rear for him a memorial of their gratitude, in the form of a statue, under which were to be carved the words :

‘TO ANER THE GOOD.’

When Aner heard of it he summoned them all to meet him. He thanked them, but begged that they would give him no such title. He was more than repaid by their affection. They had alluded to all which he had tried to do for their children who were present ; but ‘Oh, my children,’ he said—and his eyes grew dim as

he spoke—‘I ask no other reward than that you should lift for me your little white hands to Elyon and cry, “O King, be merciful to thy poor servant Aner.” And you, my friends,’ he said, ‘have contributed your money to raise me a statue. I deserve no statue. I desire no statue. It would only cause me pain. Spend the money on a little beacon light, to be kindled on every dark and stormy night upon yonder jutting headland. There has been many a shipwreck there. If there had been a beacon, some poor vessel might have been saved.’

They agreed to do this; and then, as had been preconcerted, the children came up with wreaths and flowers for Aner. The chair on which he sat was heaped around with presents, and his heart was very full. It became almost too full when the sturdy Krates led the boys in three mighty cheers for him, which multiplied themselves many times, and when Philos, who had long been the child of his heart, took his hand, and sang in his sweet voice a song which had been written in his praise.

When all the rest joined in the chorus, and the air thrilled with the intense sincerity of many voices, Aner had to hide his face in his hands that they might not see his tears.

XIV

A MAN WHO DIED FOR MEN

‘You would not let your little finger ache

For such as these!’ ‘But I would die!’ she said.

TENNYSON.

THE turret which was to bear on its summit the beacon light was begun at once; but before it could be finished there occurred one of the terrific storms which thundered for leagues along that iron coast. The villagers were roused by the news that a vessel had been driven upon the headland. The shrieks of the helpless crew were heard above the rage of the elements, and without help—which it seemed impossible to give—every soul on board must perish. Almost the whole population of Klydon hurried to the headland, and with them Xenios and Aner. The vessel, a fine and large one, had run upon an isolated rock at a little distance from the end of the headland. The wreck crashed, and creaked, and shuddered, and swayed to and fro, as billow after billow burst over it and buried it in deluges of blinding foam. It was certain that very soon it must be dashed to pieces. After a short space the shrieks were heard no more; but clinging to the shrouds of the mainmast, when for a moment the full moon gleamed through some rift in the black clouds, were just visible the figures of a

man, and of a boy who clung to him—apparently the sole survivors left upon the wreck.

The horror of the position, the knowledge that one of the survivors was a child, agonised the hearts of all the spectators; but what could be done? no boat could live for a moment in that hell of waters.

‘Oh, they must be saved! they must at all costs be saved!’ cried Aner, wringing his hands. ‘A large reward for any sailor or fisherman who will rescue them!’

No one dared to face so frightful a peril, and Aner seemed to hear a voice saying to him, ‘Would you risk the lives of others and not your own? Most of these poor men have wives and children. You are alone in the world.’

‘I am,’ he answered aloud. ‘Xenios, tie this long rope tightly round my waist. It will reach to the rock on which the ship has struck. I will try to save those two poor wretches.’

‘It will be awfully dangerous, sir,’ said Xenios.

‘I know it,’ said Aner; ‘but I am a strong swimmer and a skilled diver; and I am quite calm, and there is a chance.’

‘Don’t be such an utter and amazing fool,’ hissed the voice of Hara, who had crept up to him unseen in the darkness. ‘What is the unknown man to you? Think how useful you are! Besides, it will be suicide over again.’

‘It will be nothing of the kind,’ said Aner. ‘To die in the effort to save others is not suicide!’ And as

he turned resolutely from Hara, the flash, the throb, the whisper, which he associated with the thought of Hatob, came to him, and therewith the picture of Imrah, and the words :

I did all this for thee :

What wilt thou do for me ?

It decided him. 'Tie the rope round me, Xenios,' he said—for Xenios had hesitated—'and fear not.' While it was being tied, the boy Philos clung to him, and amid the tumult of the crowd Aner heard him sob forth, 'Oh, don't go! don't go! my second father, what should we do without you? Look at those waves!' And indeed—as he spoke—in tempestuous force, as though with the rush of thousands of white leaping steeds, and with blinding, drenching cataracts, of spray, a huge breaker shattered itself to pieces on the rock, and, with a roar and hiss, flung its scarcely expended fury almost at their feet.

Aner raised Philos in his arms and kissed him. 'Lift your innocent hands to Heaven for me, my child,' he said; and, as the breaker was falling back into the deep, conscious of all his danger, commending himself to Elyon in one agony of prayer, he plunged, and dived through the next billow before it burst. In the dim light the people, with beating hearts, saw him reach the rock, clutch it with his hands, and climb the vessel's side. He quickly mounted the mast and took the child from the man's arms.

'No time for words,' he said to the child. 'Cling to my back; let nothing make you let go. . . . Now!'

He had watched his opportunity after the burst of another monstrous billow ; he dived through the swell of the next, and struck out with mighty strokes. The trained and hardy fishermen ran down the rocky shingle in the wake of the ebbing wave, and as they hauled at the rope, he was drawn safely to shore, battered indeed, and hurled about by the storm, but safe. The boy whom he had rescued had lost consciousness. ‘Attend to him, Xenios,’ he said, ‘and, if I perish, train him with your own sons.’

‘Surely, surely you will not brave that awful struggle again, sir?’ said Xenios ; and the rough fishermen thronged round and tried to dissuade him. One or two even offered to go in his place.

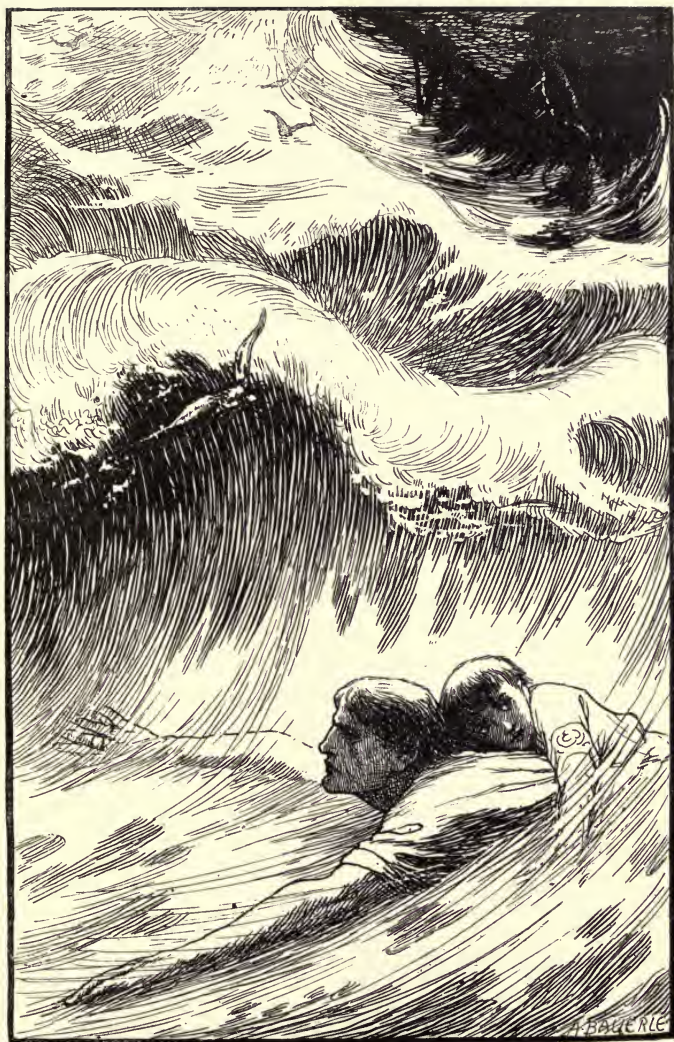
The wind yelled, the sea seemed more and more like a host of hungry demoniac monsters ; but Aner only pointed to the figure which still was visible on the summit of the swaying mast, and they saw in his eyes the light of an unquenchable determination.

‘Do not hinder me, my men,’ he said. ‘I have saved one life ; perhaps it may be granted me to save the other.’

Again he plunged and swam, and even amid the tumult of billow and hurricane he heard the burst of excited cheers which the crowd raised when they saw him once more reach the ship and climb the mast.

‘Can you swim? can you help to save yourself?’ he asked the solitary survivor.

‘I cannot,’ was the answer in tones strangely familiar to Aner ; ‘I am almost benumbed. I can scarcely even hold on to the mast.’



ANER RESCUES PHAEDROS

Who was it? Did not Aner know that voice? A gleam of moonlight shone for an instant on the man's face through the ragged rift of black clouds, and Aner recognised Eutrapelos. Had *he* also recognised in Aner the man whom he had so fearfully wronged and almost done to death?

He had! He too had been startled by the familiar voice, and the sudden gleam had revealed to him the features of Aner.

'Go!' he said; 'leave me to my fate. Have you come to torment me before the time?'

'Not to torment you, Eutrapelos,' said Aner very gently, 'but to save you; or if need be to die with you.'

'O God!' groaned Eutrapelos. His hands relaxed their grasp on the shrouds; he would have fallen fainting: but Aner upheld him, tied one coil of the rope round him, supported him on one strong arm down the mast to the edge of the rock—and plunged. He knew that it was but a forlorn chance:—but the distance from the shore was not great; the rope might drag them safely in.

Alas! as though in revenge, the huge wave swept and tossed them hither and thither, and smote them down, and rolled their bodies over on the rocks; and when it flung its expended violence on the shore, and the fishermen were at last able to draw them in, Aner was unconscious and dying, Eutrapelos was dead.

It was a thrilling scene. The boy whom Aner had saved was the son of Eutrapelos and Phaëdra, and when he saw his father lying dead, he flung him-

self upon the battered corpse and kissed the bleeding face and raised piteous cries. But round the dying Aner multitudes gathered with loud wailing. The women tore their hair and wrung their hands; the children were all weeping; even the brown faces of strong men were bathed in tears, as they lifted their friend and benefactor most gently in their arms and laid him on a litter and carried him to his home. But it was most of all pitiable to see the two sons of Xenios. Krates, the elder boy, was sobbing as if his heart would break; Philos was clinging to the cold hand which hung from the couch, and kissing it again and again. He was very pale, and too deeply moved even for tears.

They took Aner to his room. All that devoted tendance could do was done; but for many hours the dark eyes remained closed, no gleam of consciousness returned to them.

Yet while Aner lay there, seemingly without life, unable to speak or stir, he was aware of the love and tenderness of his weeping friends, and all other feelings were lost in a deep sense of peace. He felt as if Hatob were beside him and were holding him by the hand, and smiling on him with that smile which had seemed so radiant to him when he was a boy; and he saw, or seemed to see, Imrah himself standing patiently by his bedside waiting for him, and shedding on him the light of his countenance, in which was unimaginable beatitude.

Only at the last did Aner recover consciousness.

His eyes opened. Xenios was watching him in speechless sorrow.

‘Xenios,’ he said in his weak voice, ‘my true and faithful friend, I am leaving you. I am going home. I bequeath to you all that I possess. Bring your children here, and the boy whom I saved from the wreck.’

They came. The boy had all the beauty of his mother, Phaedra. ‘What do they call you, my little lad?’ asked Aner.

‘They called me Phaedros,’ said the boy; ‘but they are dead.’

‘Elyon leaves none orphans who seek him, my boy. Xenios will be your father; his sons your brothers. Resist evil. Live for others and you will be happy. And you, my Krates,’ he said, ‘set Phaedros a good example and be very kind to him.’ He laid his right hand on the head of Phaedros, his left on the head of Krates, and blessed them tenderly. Then he folded his arms round his little Philos, breathed one prayer for the weeping child, blessed him, and bade them all farewell.

Xenios alone remained with him.

‘Xenios,’ he murmured, ‘I am happy, very happy. Do you know who that boy is?’

‘No, sir,’ said Xenios.

‘He is,’ said Aner, ‘the son of her whom I once called my wife. . . . And do you know who was the man whom I tried to save?’

‘Was he——?’ Xenios hesitated before he uttered the name.

‘I see that you have guessed aright,’ said Aner. ‘Yes! he was my worst enemy, Eutrapelos; and I am so happy that he knew before he was drowned that it was I who had tried to save him.’

‘Forgiving and forgiven, beloved master!’ sobbed Xenios.

‘Farewell, Xenios,’ whispered Aner, barely able to speak any longer. ‘Do not weep for me. I am happy at last. If this be death, it is not nearly so hard a thing to die as I thought it was.’

A moment later Xenios saw Aner half rise from his bed, while a light, as of heaven, gleamed on his countenance and shone from his yearning eyes.

‘Oh, my Father!’ he cried, ‘forgiven! forgiven! Cherubim and Seraphim!’ He opened his eyes wide: then the light faded from them, and he sank back dead, with a happy smile upon his lips.

The whole population of Klydon, in deepest sadness, accompanied by all the children weeping for him, followed his body to the tomb where they laid him; and on it they inscribed, ‘To Aner, our Benefactor.’

But Aner seemed to himself to be on a black barge, on a dark and illimitable sea, and at first there was an awful hush. Then he became conscious that Hatob held him by the hand, as the bark glided over the waveless depths. Scarcely daring to break the silence, yet he whispered, ‘Whither?’ And Hatob,



TWO BRIGHT FORMS MET HIM

without speaking, pointed him to the horizon. There, on one spot of the dark sea, blazed a glory as of sunshine. Towards this the bark sped. And as it sped and he sat silent, he thought that he heard the low sweet voice of Hatob singing to him the words of a poet whom he had known :

When on my day of life the night is falling,
And in the winds, from unsunned spaces blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown.

I have but Thee, my Father ; let Thy Spirit
Be with me then to comfort and uphold ;
No gate of pearl, no branch of palm, I merit.
No street of shining gold.

Suffice it if—my good and ill unreckoned,
And both forgiven through Thy abounding grace—
I find myself by hands familiar beckoned
Unto my fitting place.

Some humble door among Thy many mansions,
Some sheltering shade where sin and striving cease,
And flows for ever through Heaven's blue expansions
The river of Thy peace.

There, from the music round about me stealing,
Soon may I learn the new and holy song,
And find at last beneath Thy trees of healing
The life for which I long.

The bark touched the shore. No trumpets sounded for him on the other side, but two bright forms, clad with wings, met him and took him by the hand. They clothed him in white raiment. They entered a gate of pearl, and through a sea of heavenly light he saw a

rainbow round a throne, in sight like unto an emerald. Aner flung himself upon his face. The wounded hand of Imrah raised him, and when he dared to look up he saw the glory of his Father's countenance, and his Father smiled on him, and welcomed his weary wanderer home.

THE CHOICE

I

Before man is life and death : whether him liketh shall be given him.—*Ecclus.* xv. 17.

Dein Schicksal ruht in deiner eigner Brust.—SCHILLER.

THERE were three youths among the Porphyrians, in a region of the Purple Island different from that of which we have spoken ; for the Porphyrians had among them various nations and communities and languages.

The names of these three youths, who knew each other well, and had passed through a similar education, were Faber, Festus, and Fidelis. Their fathers were men of the middle rank of life, neither poor nor rich, neither noble nor plebeian. They could give their sons the best of educations up to early manhood ; after that the youths were compelled of necessity to be the architects of their own fortune, the arbiters of their own destiny in the Purple Island, and thereafter.

These three youths had just been emancipated from tutors and governors, and now stood on the marble threshold of their manly years. They had in themselves the materials for success, or the germs for

future failure. They were free to make or mar the conditions of their existence.

The world was all before them where to choose their place of rest ; and Providence would be their Guide if they did not prefer to take the guidance into their own weak hands.

All three had on their faces the charm of youth ; but otherwise they were very different in appearance. The face of Faber was striking. His open brow was surrounded by short waves of dark hair. The expression of his lips was firm ; there was a look of command in his eyes ; you felt that, whatever errors he might commit, he would do nothing ignoble. Upon the face of Festus, on the other hand, there was a somewhat soft and effeminate expression. His light hair was parted in the middle and broke into a tangle of curls over his forehead ; his lips were full and tremulous ; his glance wandered from place to place. His manner was caressing. The third youth, Fidelis, was not in the least handsome, as the others were, but he looked the picture of health and honest manliness : on all who spoke to him he left the impression of courtesy and modest strength.

They were taking a brief holiday before entering on the task of earning their own living. They had spent this delightful interspace of leisure in wandering among the wildest scenes of the Purple Island, seeing places of fame or beauty, which it might not be their chance ever to revisit.

In the course of these wanderings they had come to



THE WISHING WELL

a remote village, where the present inhabitants were still given to obsolete superstitions. In this village was a well, known as the Wishing Well. You had but to drop a pebble into its depths, the villagers said, and to wish for anything you liked while it was sinking to the bottom ; if the patron spirit of the well approved of you, your wish would be granted.

The three youths stood beside the well.

‘If people really believed in this well,’ said Faber, ‘I should think that it would have been choked up with pebbles long ago, for human desires are as insatiable as hunger or the sea.’

‘Perhaps the well is fathomless,’ said Festus. ‘At any rate, don’t let us miss a chance. Here goes my pebble, and I make my wish.’

‘It’s all nonsense, I believe,’ said Faber, smiling. ‘Nevertheless I always succumb to this nonsense. I always make a wish when I see a piebald horse, and I always turn my money in my purse when I hear the first cuckoo. So here goes my pebble, and I make my wish.’

‘Now, Fidelis,’ said his two companions, ‘in with your pebble !’

‘Not I,’ said Fidelis, laughing.

‘Ah,’ said Festus, ‘he is a philosopher, or a cynic, or something of that sort. He rises superior to our weak credulity.’

‘I am not what you say, Festus,’ he answered, ‘though I believe in the well as little as you. Yet that is not my reason for not throwing in the pebble.’

‘What then ?’

‘Because I have no particular wish to make.’

‘No wish!’ said Faber; ‘I have a multitude of devouring and consuming wishes.’

‘No wish!’ said Festus, ‘while there are hundreds of delights which others enjoy, and which are wholly beyond your reach and ours? What a Phoenix you must be!’

‘Well,’ said Fidelis, ‘if you really press me, I must say that most things men wish for are banes, not boons. You know how one poet said, long ago, that the easy gods have overthrown whole families at their own desire, and another that man is dearer to the gods than even to himself, and that it is better to leave our destinies in their hands; and another, still more wisely—

We, ignorant of ourselves,
Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers
Deny us for our good. So gain we profit
By losing of our prayers.’

‘Oh, spare us, spare us!’ said Festus. ‘When Fidelis begins to quote the poets, it’s all up with ordinary mortals. He pours them on us in cataracts.’

‘Whom could I quote more usefully?’ asked Fidelis good-humouredly. ‘Who are sweeter or wiser teachers of what is pure and good? But—without quoting any more poets—though, after all, they only sum up the universal experience which all know and all ignore—you will hardly deny that men, like rats, often ravin their own proper bane.’

‘There he goes! He quotes a poet even while he is saying he won’t quote any more!’ said Festus.

‘Do you really mean to tell us, Fidelis,’ said Faber, ‘that you are quite content with everything as it is?’

‘I am by no means such a vain creature as to be perfectly content with *myself*, Faber, if you mean that; but, as regards all else, I am content so far.’

‘I am not,’ said Faber frankly. ‘You and I are going to enter into professions. We shall toil and drudge for years, and perhaps—only “perhaps”—after all this dust and desk-work, when youth is over, when life has become stale——’

‘When,’ interpolated Festus, ‘pleasure has lost all deliciousness, and the roses are withered, and fruits have lost their savour.’

‘When,’ continued Faber, ‘the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper be a burden, and desire shall fail—then we shall possibly—only “possibly”—have made enough to live on, not in splendour, perhaps barely in comfort, but only in a grinding and degrading mediocrity of struggle and anxiety, while thousands of fools, born with golden spoons in their mouths, welter in dull abundance and are promoted without an effort to the highest offices.’

‘Who are the cynics now?’ said Fidelis. ‘What a dismal picture of life! I don’t accept it. To you, Faber, I say—not to Festus, as he hates poetry—

The sunshine and the shadow of our lives
Are less in our surroundings than ourselves.’

‘Well, then,’ said Faber, ‘why don’t you wish something about your own self?’

‘That does not come by *wishing*, Faber, but by *willing*. One can’t yawn it into being while one lolls on flowery beds.’

‘There he goes, quoting two more poets in one line!’ said Festus.

‘Never mind what Festus says,’ said Faber. ‘Go on.’

‘I don’t want to bore you,’ said Fidelis, ‘but you know, as well as I do, that we have to *make* our true selves; we have to *acquire* ourselves.’

‘What is the good of oneself,’ asked Festus scornfully, ‘if one can’t enjoy oneself? Lest you should think that you have the poetry all to yourself, I say—

‘Go live your life, and be yourself,
And take the goods the gods provide ;

“pluck the blossom of the flying day.”’

‘It wasn’t I who brought on this conversation, Festus,’ said Fidelis; ‘but as to your question, the answer depends on what you call “enjoyment” and what you mean by “oneself.” Do you mean by “self” a bundle of passions, or something more divine? Do you mean by “yourself” a human animal or a child of light? Do you mean a hunger, a thirst, a fever, an appetite, or——?’

‘Bah!’ said Festus, interrupting, ‘I am what I am. We are not now in a sermon-house.’

‘Be it so. Pardon my involuntary sententiousness. Well, I will only say to Faber, who is not quite so impatient as you are, that, as far as I can make out, there is quite as much real happiness in the

struggling middle class, to which we all three belong—yes, and even “in huts, where poor men lie”—as among the rich and great. I say with the old lame slave who was dear to the immortals, “Give me the man who is poor and yet happy; sick and yet happy; despised and yet happy; slandered and yet happy; persecuted and powerless and yet happy. *He* is a true man.” What is best for us is given us, and the best is good enough.’

‘Old saws,’ sneered Festus.

‘Yes, and modern instances too, Festus, as we may all three live to find.’

‘I won’t be so brusque as Festus,’ said Faber, ‘but is not the line you are taking rather ideal?’

‘Is it idealism to be content, Faber? On the contrary I prefer the realism of attainable happiness to wild and deluding hopes. Having light enough for present purposes, I don’t want to clutch at the stars.’

‘You are a Stoic,’ said Festus, ‘and no doubt believe that your wise man would be happy even while he was howling in the red-hot Bull of Phalaris. But if only you had a beard, I would pull your beard as the boys in Rome used to do when they heard some ragged Stoic boasting that he was a king.’

‘Luckily, as you say, I have no beard yet,’ said Fidelis laughing. ‘But you have dropped your pebbles into the well and wished; and, though you have been very rude to me, Festus, yet, if the granting of your wishes would be a boon, I will wish that your wishes may come true. But now—you see that beacon on the hill? I will race you both there, and will not tire you

any more with my sermons, as Festus calls them, for which I ask your pardon.'

Festus began the race for a short distance, and then stopped, saying, 'Far too much trouble: why should I bother myself, when there is not even a crown of parsley or of olive to be won by it?' So, while he lagged hopelessly behind, the other two ran a close race, until Fidelis got clearly ahead and seated himself, laughing, under a shady tree. Faber came up, not at all pleased at having been beaten. But he was soon put into a good humour again, for Fidelis did not triumph over him, and only attributed his victory to the fact that Faber carried more weight.

II

Libenter homines id quod volunt credunt.—CÆSAR, *De Bell. Gall.* iii. 18.

Cursed with every granted prayer.—POPE.

FROM the hill-top they saw the little village where they were to sleep that night, and they made their way thither.

It was an enchanting spot. The sea there was pure and uncontaminated, varying hour after hour from bright green and purple to sapphire blue. It was a delight to watch the sea-birds sailing over it, or resting on its heaving bosom, and to listen to its unending laughter, and see its wavelets as they plashed in the evening light in rainbow lustre upon the sandy shore.

After they had refreshed themselves, the three youths wandered out to a headland which jutted into the sea. Here they separated, and each chose his own place where to sit and watch the splendour of the sun as it set into the encrimsoned waves, while they breathed the balm of the fresh evening air.

Faber climbed down the cliff and seated himself on the rocks at the utmost point of the headland, where there was nothing in front of him but the restless waters. He had taken with him a book of the stories of heroes and kings, and how they had reared their trophies 'on the neck of crowned fortune proud.' 'While as for me,' he thought with a sigh, 'I seem doomed to a life narrow, limited, of low and dim horizon; and then,' he added, flinging a piece of rock into the sea, 'I shall sink into the waters of oblivion like that rock, and shall very soon be quite as much forgotten as if I had never been—like those ripples which the wave obliterates almost as soon as they are formed.'

Had the stone which he had flung disturbed a spirit from the deep? It might have seemed so; for immediately he saw a figure as of a man approach him, luminous and shadowy, of stately aspect, but of somewhat troubled brow.

'Youth!' said the Spirit, 'I was beside thee at the well. I read thy thoughts; I heard thy unuttered meditations. Listen! It has been permitted me to grant to men the thing that they desire. Even without personal experience, they might, if they chose, judge what is good and what is harmful. Nor are my gifts

supernatural. All men are, on the whole, what they desire to be; and, more or less, all men may obtain the things for which they strive. Choose, then, for thine own life, what thou dost most desire.'

For a moment Faber was silent, for some of the things which Fidelis had said came into his mind.

'Thou dost well to pause,' said the Spirit. 'Let thy choice be deliberate. Before yon sun has set, I will return; and then—if thou wilt—receive at my hand the amulet which will give thee thy choice—be it riches, or pleasure, or fame, or power.'

FESTUS

Δελεάζοντες ψυχὰς ἀστηρίκτους.—2 Pet. ii. 14.

Sua cuique deus fit dira cupido.—VERG. *Æn.* ix. 185.

WHILST Faber had been climbing over the steep crags to reach his rocky throne, Festus had chosen out the sunniest place he could find, where the moss was softest, and the flowering thyme most fragrant; and there he had flung himself down at full length in the easiest of postures. He had taken with him a loose, voluptuous fiction, base and morally effeminating. It was one of those utterly pestilent books which call evil good, and good evil, and paint the gates of hell with Paradise. In this vile book, which, had he been wise and manly, he would have flung at the first page into the fire, or, even now, ere he had fully imbibed its

poison, would have kicked with indignation into the purging brine—in this poisonous pasture of the devil—

Greedily he engorged without restraint,
And knew not eating death.

And when he shut it up, to roll its evil taste like a delicious morsel under his tongue, he suddenly heard a ripple of laughter. Looking up he saw one of Ashmod's spirits close beside him, not shining, but rosy and in radiant garb, and with long golden hair floating in the evening breeze. He tried to grasp her hand, but—

‘Oh, no!’ she said; ‘I have come to grant you the wish you made by the well.’

‘How do you know it, lovely maiden?’ he asked.

‘Never mind that,’ she answered. ‘Enough that now, if you like, you may choose what you will have, and what you choose shall be given you.’

Festus paused as Faber had paused. Even to his indolent and frivolously self-indulgent nature it seemed too serious a thing to decide at once—for he felt that the promise carried in it the potency of its own fulfilment. Could he really dare to state what he would choose for the portion of his entire life in the Purple Island?

‘As you like,’ cried the bewitching spirit. ‘I shall disappear; but before the sun touches the wave with his lower rim you must be ready to decide, or I withdraw my offer to grant you the wish you made when you dropped your pebble into the well.’

She turned away; but the mind of Festus was throbbing with the evil images and suggestions of the

book in which he had voluntarily been reading himself to death, and he called after her: 'Stay! stay!—you are not deceiving me?'

'Not in the smallest degree,' she said. 'Choose or refuse exactly as you like. It is absolutely in your own power.'

'But you will want me to sign some bond to sell my soul, or something of that sort?'

'Not one syllable,' she answered with a shrill and scornful laugh. But Festus still hesitated,

Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage.

At last he cried out: 'Come back before the sun begins to set; but I wish you would give me some proof that your promises are real.'

'Take this, then,' she said; and with a touch of her soft hand, which thrilled him through and through, she placed in his palm a rosy fruit of intoxicating perfume. 'But remember, you may not taste it till after your choice. Its ambrosial fragrance will suffice. If you disobey me in this, I shall not return.'

She gave him one more enchanting smile, and then seemed to melt away into the blue waves—for she was Naama, the demon of unlawful indulgences.

FIDELIS

Not what we wish, but what we want,
Thy bounteous grace supply ;
The good unasked in mercy grant,
The ill, though asked, deny.

Der Erde köstlichster Gewinn
Ist frohes Herz und reiner Sinn.

SEAME, *Gedichte*.

THE third youth, Fidelis, had chosen his seat on the topmost point of the headland, fronting the pure sea wind, which seemed to bring him health and strength and courage at every breath. He too had taken a book with him. It was a book for a true man. It stirred the noble heart as with the blast of a trumpet, intermingled with Doric strains of beauty, natural and unadorned. It was a song 'to add ardour to virtue, and confidence to truth.' It was

An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine, of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chanted.

As the youth read it, his pure, strong face seemed to shine with the inward light of the thoughts on which he dwelt, and when he closed the poem he was full of manly courage and noble resolution. His musings turned upon the lives of the wise and good of which he had read of old. He recalled how the daily prayer of one had been, 'Give me, O Lord, a noble heart which no earthly affection can drag down ;' and how, when the vision appeared to this saint and offered him any reward which he desired, he answered, '*Non aliam, nisi te, Domine*' ('No other than Thyself, O Lord !').

And even as these thoughts were in his heart, he became conscious that some one was beside him, of noble presence, on whose features seemed to be written, as one has said, not only the Ten Commandments, but the Eight Beatitudes. His presence did not seem strange to Fidelis, though he realised that this was no human visitor. He felt happy, and not in the least afraid.

‘Fidelis,’ said the Visitant, ‘I heard all that you said to your comrades by the Wishing Well. I have come to test your sincerity. It did not require much effort to refuse to wish, for you did not believe in the power of the well ; but now I have come to offer you definitely whatever you desire. At a word, riches shall be your lot in life, or honours, or fame, or position, or what men call pleasure. You shall not answer me now ; but before the sun touches the sea I will again be with you, and you shall tell me your decision.’

‘If, sir, I could wish,’ said Fidelis, ‘that I might ever be hardened against myself, this worst traitor to myself—

This traitor with pathetic voice,
That craves for rest, and ease, and joys ;—

if I could wish that I might be enabled to be a good man—to be always true to the best I know—then I would wish for that. But I suppose it does not come within the scope of your offer ? ’

‘It does not,’ said the stern sweet voice. ‘Self-conquest cannot depend on an external gift. It is the reward of unending effort, the achievement of sincere and unwavering desire.’

Fidelis turned towards him, but he had gone. He mused. 'I have no objection,' thought he, 'to riches in themselves, if they come. They may be well used. Perhaps to those who are consummately wise they may be a source of satisfaction; but I never knew any one yet whom they made happy, and I have seen how terribly often they cause a subtle deterioration in the character of those who grow insensibly to love them. No, I will *not* ask for riches. Honours? I would much rather achieve them than have them as a gift. Fame? What is fame?—"the murmur of the unborn about the grave." Pleasure? is not all innocent pleasure already at my command? And as for guilty pleasure, it is anguish in the bud: it first depraves, then ruins, then destroys. No, I have read in Elyon's book, "Entrust thy way unto the Lord, and He shall direct thy paths."'

III

FABER

Ambition this shall tempt to rise.—GRAY.

Devine si tu peux et choisis si tu l'oses.—CORNEILLE, *Héracl.* iv. 5.

THE sun was now rapidly descending. He had already made the curtains of his chamber flame with purple and violet, and was

Proudly carpeting
The western waves with glory, ere he deigned
To set his foot upon them.

Faber still sat on his projecting rock, and the seething waves seemed to inspire him with the passion

to plunge into them and buffet with and master them. The line of the old Greek poet was ringing in his ears :

αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ υπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων

and he longed to be in the front rank and the loftiest place. But how could *he* ever attain to be first and best, and a chief among his fellow-men ? How could he ever make himself felt and heard, from that dreadful depth below the surface in which he feared that he must be thrown by the mediocre conditions of his life ? Was life worth living, if all that he could hope for was, by the time he was an elderly man, to have attained to the possible dignity of being a head clerk ? He longed to be somebody and something, and felt stirring within him the passion and the power to rule.

At this crisis in his thoughts he perceived that the luminous shadowy figure had taken its stand unnoticed beside him.

‘Youth,’ said the spirit, ‘have you made your choice ?’

‘Is it unconditional ?’ asked Faber.

‘It is.’

‘If I choose your proffered gift of success, shall I rise to the highest things ?’

‘To the highest positions, undoubtedly.’

‘What sign will you give me ?’

‘A mark upon your breast. It will stay there indelibly, unless you yourself entreat that it should be obliterated ; but the moment that I obliterate it, you will sink back into obscurity.’

‘There is not the least chance that I shall ever entreat for that,’ said Faber. ‘I choose success!’



THE FINGER OF THE SPIRIT TOUCHED HIS BREAST

‘Is your choice final?’

‘It is.’

‘Then open your robe.’

He did so, and the finger of the spirit touched his breast. The touch for one instant felt like fire.

‘Farewell,’ said the spirit, ‘until you summon me again.’

‘Farewell,’ said Faber joyfully to the vanishing figure. ‘Now the world is before me! I shall be great, I shall be famous!—What mark has he left?’

He looked, and saw that over his heart was impressed the vivid picture of a scarlet tulip.

‘It is brilliant,’ said Faber. ‘But the tulip has no fragrance and no fruit. Never mind. It is a flower which no one can overlook.’

FESTUS

Δελεαζόμενος καὶ ἐξελλκόμενος.—James i. 14.

FESTUS still lolled on the mossy, fragrant thyme-besprinkled turf, the evil book beside him, his thoughts lapped in luxurious daydreams which seemed to acquire a more voluptuous fascination as he inhaled the fragrance of the rosy fruit which Naama had left in his hand. He felt tempted to taste it; ‘but if I do,’ he said, ‘I shall lose my chance.’

‘Pleasure!’ he thought to himself. The Siren had offered him abundance of pleasure. He might bathe in it; steep his imagination with it; thrill his senses with it. And what could he have better? Everything in the world is less than nothing, the sages said; and happi-

ness is 'a pearl not of the Indian, but of the empyrean ocean.' If that were so, what could he grasp more tangible, more enchanting than pleasure? Was he an icicle? Did not the young blood tingle in his veins? Was the rejoicing tide of his youth to plash idly on the barren sands of mere professional drudgery? The spirit had placed the rainbow in his grasp; he would clutch at it.

His thoughts were interrupted by a burst of silvery laughter, and Naama in all her beauty flashed upon him.

'Well, fair youth,' she asked, 'have you made your choice?'

'I have,' he said—pleased to be called 'fair youth.' 'If I choose pleasure, will you give it me abundantly and without stint?'

'Aye,' she said, laughing again very merrily. 'Not for one day only, or two days, or three days, but for many days, until,' she murmured to herself, 'like the quails which the Israelites preferred to their white angelic manna, it shall come out at your nostrils and be loathsome to you.'

'What is that you are murmuring to yourself?' asked Festus reproachfully. 'What is your name?'

'They call me Naama,' she answered lightly.

'But Naama is the name of an evil spirit.'

'As you like,' she answered with another peal of mirth. 'I offer you pleasure. Reject it if you will.'

'Shall I be doing very wrong if I accept?'

'What is right? What is wrong?' she said with

scornful impatience. 'All *that* is for your decision. It is *your* concern, not ours. But what mortal did we spirits, whom you impudently call evil, ever even *try* to persuade that black was white, or evil good? We do not deceive; we tempt.'

Festus was awed to silence, and she pointed with her finger impatiently to the sun.

'One moment,' she said, 'and its rim will have touched the wave. It will then be too late. Once more I offer you pleasure. Will you take it?'

He smelt at the fruit in his hand, and its perfume seemed to sweep him away upon a wave of delirious gratification.

'I accept it,' he said passionately. 'What sign will you give me?'

'I have given you one in that fruit. I will give you another. Open your breast.'

He did so. He felt the burning touch of her finger over his heart. He looked to see what mark it had left. It was a blue lotus-flower, which looked as if it had dreamy enchantment on every leaf.

He turned round, and as Naama vanished he saw the flash of malignant disdain on her lovely lips, and heard the echo of mocking laughter, in which many voices seemed to join. He was disconcerted, though he tried to persuade himself that what he had heard was only the plashing of the sea waves. The fruit was in his hands, and he thought that now he would not only inhale its overpowering scent, but also eat it. He did so. For an instant it seemed in his mouth like honey of

maddening sweetness ; but even as he tasted he seemed to feel in it a sting of bitter absinth, and after one or two mouthfuls he found that, though it was rich near the rind, it was poisonously rotten at the core.

‘The fruit is a fraud,’ he said, flinging away its already withered and evil-scented husk. ‘Never mind ; pleasure of all kinds is in my grasp.’

FIDELIS

Question not, but live and labour
Till your goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none.
Life is mostly froth and bubble ;
Two things stand like stone—
KINDNESS in another’s trouble,
COURAGE in your own.—A. LINDSAY GORDON.

FIDELIS still sat on the summit of the headland, drinking in the healthful breeze which came to him over leagues of the pure sea. Suddenly he noticed that the sun was near its setting and the Presence was by his side. Fidelis bowed reverently.

‘Have you made your choice, my son ?’

The youth bent his eyes downwards, and said with deep modesty, ‘Blame me not, my father, if I choose not one of the gifts which you proffered me.’

‘Do you not desire happiness ?’ said the old man with a smile.

‘You did not offer me happiness, sir,’ said Fidelis,

‘but only gifts which some men deem to confer happiness—some, but not all, and not the wisest.’

‘Not the wisest?’

‘I am too young and too inexperienced,’ said Fidelis, ‘to know for myself. But you offered me riches, and I have read of one wise king who prayed, “Give me neither poverty nor riches;” and of another—the richest king who ever was—whom the sage would not pretend to consider happy, but thought that some humble good men and true were far more to be envied. And, looking at it on the other side, I have read of one who was a cripple and a slave, and yet happier than emperors. And pleasure?—is it not granted us to drink as out of a river, all the *innocent* pleasure which life can give?—I would not say all this if I did not feel that you approve.’

‘And do you care nothing for fame?’ asked the sage.

‘Yes, sir, if it comes from real desert. But, in this case too, those who have enjoyed the highest fame say that it is half disfame.’

‘You are quite right, Fidelis,’ said his visitant. ‘You have already what may be a priceless gift—your own being. Acquire yourself more and more, and you will have a possession of which nothing can rob you. Whatever else you lose, your true self will be a better possession and an abiding. And no one can *give* it you; it must be won.’

‘Then grant me your blessing, father,’ said Fidelis.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I bless you; and, as you have asked

nothing, I give you something better than all I offered, and therewith a sign. Unfold your robe.'

Fidelis did so, and the sage placed a finger upon his breast and disappeared. Fidelis looked and saw over his heart the figure of a lovely pansy. Then he smiled joyfully, for he recalled a passage in an allegory which he had read as a child, how certain pilgrims saw a shepherd boy, meanly clad, but withal of a fresh and well-favoured countenance, who sat and sang; and as they listened to what the shepherd lad sang, it was :

He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride :
He that is lowly ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much,
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because Thou lovest such.

'Then,' said Mr. Greatheart, 'hear what the shepherd lad saith : " I warrant that this boy carries more of the herb called Heartsease in his bosom than many who walk in silk and velvets." '

The three youths met that evening after the sun had set, but they did not say much to each other, nor did they reveal what had occurred to them, or show the secret signs imprinted on their breasts. Faber seemed thoughtful and inclined to silence. Festus was moody, fretful, and impatient. Fidelis was very quiet,

but a light of inward happiness gleamed in his eyes and beamed on his open face, making it almost beautiful to look upon.

Next morning the three friends met at breakfast, and Faber asked, 'Did you two find any flowers in your rooms last night?'

'Yes,' said Festus and Fidelis.

'How strange!' said Faber.

'Why strange?' asked Fidelis.

'Because I found some in mine, and no one in the inn knows anything about them. Indeed, they asked where I got them, for they said that no such flowers grow here.'

'What flowers were they?'

'There was a great china bowl full of peonies. Ugly, flaunting things! I disliked the look of them so much that I put them outside the door. Were peonies put in your room too, Festus?'

'No. I found a huge bunch of syringas. Their scent was so rich, sickly, and overpowering, that I flung them out of the window.'

'How strange!' said Faber again. 'What flowers had you, Fidelis?'

'Well, I seem to have been much luckier than you,' said Fidelis. 'I found in my room two small vases of iridescent glass. One of them was full of sweet violets; the other full of lilies of the valley. I was charmed with them, and shall take them away with me.'

'The spirit of the Wishing Well must have been amusing himself with us, I think,' said Faber. 'I

can't make it out. But anyhow, you had the best of it, Fidelis.'

Next day the youths began their homeward journey to the great city of the Porphyrians; for now their holiday was over, and the serious work of life had to begin. We shall see what came of the choice they made.

IV

FABER

Omnia fui, et nihil expedit.—SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS.

FABER had chosen from the spirit the boon of success, and his success was astonishing in its rapidity. He had been destined for the career of a merchant and entered an office to learn his work. A good many of the youths of the neighbourhood in which he lived had combined to take part once a week in a mock-political assemblage, both for the sake of amusement and at the same time to train themselves in the gift of oratory, which was in high demand among the Porphyrians. Usually on grand occasions their gathering was honoured by the presence of some high Porphyrian lord, who thought it worth his while to look out for any indications of rising talent. One of these occasions occurred within a month of the return of Faber from his holiday. A formal debate was held. In this debate it fell to Faber to make an unpremeditated answer to

all his oratorical opponents. He did this with such grace, readiness, and mastery of the question, that the great visitor was surprised and delighted. Faber resolutely grasped the numerous arguments which had been urged on the other side, and showed them to be quite irrelevant. He tore to shreds the objections which had been adduced against him, with masterful and good-humoured irony. Always self-reliant, he gained yet stronger confidence from the consciousness that he was winning an intellectual victory. He ended his speech with a peroration so vigorous in its eloquence as fairly to carry the assemblage by storm and to win the majority of votes, which at first had seemed to be more than dubious. He sat down amid a tumult of applause, during which the distinguished visitor whispered to a friend that, even in the national Synod, he had never listened to a more masterly debating speech.

‘This young man,’ he added, ‘must be looked after.’

He requested the president of the debate to present Faber to him, and, struck with the youth’s fine face, modest self-reliance, and attractive demeanour, asked him to call at his house the next day.

Faber kept his appointment punctually. He entered the library of the minister with beating heart, yet without the smallest touch of awkwardness or servility.

‘I was much pleased with the ability you displayed yesterday,’ said his Excellency. ‘It happens that I am in immediate want of the services of a secretary.’

May I offer the post to you? It is an important one and much sought after.'

Faber accepted the office with delight and gratitude. It was an office far more honourable than he ever dreamed could have fallen to him so soon. In a very short time he learnt to discharge swiftly and skilfully the necessary duties. He won the minister's unreserved confidence, and not only became familiar with the ordinary details of the public business of the nation, but was so much trusted as to be admitted into state secrets of high importance. He thus gained an insight into the innermost workings of national diplomacy.

In this way he became acquainted and even intimate with many other great Porphyrian statesmen. There was a powerful party opposed to their views, and a contest was coming on for an important seat in the Synod, which the existing government scarcely hoped to wrest out of the hands of a strong opponent.

'My secretary, Faber, will win the election for us if any one can,' said the minister. His colleagues took the same view and sent the young man to contest the constituency. Here again, from the first day of his visit, he carried all before him. The party of the rival candidate did their utmost to discredit him as a mere boy, and the candidate himself tried to make fun of him. He had reason to regret his temerity. Faber more than justified 'the atrocious crime of being a young man.' He overwhelmed his rival with good-natured yet most telling irony. His wit and geniality aroused the

enthusiasm of every audience which he addressed, while his close and accurate grasp of the principles of true government commanded the admiration of the more educated electors. When the result of the poll was declared, he stood at the head of it by a triumphant majority, and his success had the further advantage of restoring the somewhat wavering fortunes of his party. He happened one day to glance at the tulip marked upon his breast. He thought that it had never before looked so dazzling in its colours.

Then began his great career in the Senate. As he had little or nothing of his own to live on, the ministry presented him to a lucrative sinecure, in order that he might devote his time and talents uninterruptedly to their political interests. They were well repaid. More than one brilliant victory in the Senate was won solely by his ability and eloquence. He sometimes even accomplished the rare feat of changing votes. His anticipated intervention in any debate was sure to fill the galleries with an expectant throng. He became indispensable; and, young as he was, a vacancy was created for him in the ranks of the ministry. He began to be universally spoken of as 'the boy minister' and 'the coming man.'

His party was at last defeated, but after a brief interval his genius rallied the scattered forces of the ousted ministers. There was an appeal to the country and they returned to power. He could now practically command almost any post that he desired. He was honoured with a title; he was appointed to great foreign

embassies; and, as the years rolled on, the unknown and humbly born youth at last became the chief statesman of the Porphyrian nation. The promise of success which the vision had made to him had been fulfilled more amply than he could possibly have dreamed. He had not nearly reached middle age, and he stood at the head of the government of his country.

All this was the history of his outward life, and his name was quoted to point the proverbs of success. When a father had an able and ambitious boy, he described the career of Faber to spur him on to fresh exertions. Faber's picture was placed in the hall of the school in which he had been educated, that the example of his successful diligence might stir the lads to aim at similar results. He was the leading man of his day, and the popular hero among the multitudes of his fellow-countrymen.

But was he happy?

He lived for politics, for party, for power; but this question would sometimes force itself upon him, 'Am I happy?' And he could not disguise from himself the answer that he was *not*.

For he found in his lot, and had created for himself in choosing that lot, many drawbacks.

He learnt by experience that power itself is a very relative word. From the nature of things he could never be an autocrat. He had to work with human materials, and he found that human beings are a very

unmalleable iron, or, at best, a very stubborn clay. There were hundreds of things which he would have liked to do, and which he clearly saw to be the right things to do, but in which he was thwarted by the opinionativeness of critics, the jealousy of rivals, the incompetence of subordinates. In consequence of this he was often mortified by being compelled to abandon his most cherished designs. He used laughingly to complain that he was driven back from many a striking plan by the bovine resoluteness of infallible ignorance and horned stupidity.

The same want of adequate support threw upon him a terrible amount of labour. There was much of his correspondence to which, from its nature, he was compelled personally to attend. He sometimes said to himself, 'I am chained to my desk as much as if I were a clerk.' At times he had to work twelve hours a day, till his head and his hand alike were aching.

He also felt a terrible burden of responsibility. The decisions which depended on his judgment were of the most complicated character, and involved stupendous issues. He was not infallible. He could not know everything. He was liable to be deceived. It was inevitable that he should sometimes be led into mistakes, and it made him miserable to think that, even when those mistakes were chiefly due to the carelessness or inferiority of his colleagues, political exigencies compelled him to defend them. The blame of them was thrown upon him, though in the inner councils of the government he might have done his utmost to oppose

them. There were times when extreme anxiety almost broke down his health. He felt

Desperate currents of a whole world's anguish
Forced through the channel of a single heart.

He saw around him grave conditions of evil, both social and foreign, which it was wholly beyond his power to amend.

Then he felt, like the rankling of a viper's tooth, the sting of ingratitude. Men whose fortunes he had made deserted him for the claims of self-interest. Men whom he had assisted, secretly vilified him. He could not help wincing under the unmeasured scurrility of the attacks made upon him in public journals. Because he was more foresighted than most, and spoke the truth, and did his duty, he had to thwart many vested interests in falsehood and wickedness, and in consequence he had to face measureless insult, and to pass through tornadoes of abuse. It sometimes seemed to him as if no calumny were too monstrous for envy to believe, no misrepresentation too gross to pass current among the commonplace, the envious, and the malignant. He felt almost driven to adopt the remark of a brilliant President that 'the more familiar he grew with human nature, the deeper was the respect he felt for his dog.' He used to tell the story of the great philosopher who, being asked on his deathbed by a fussy interloper, 'Are you convinced of the greatness of God?' answered, 'Yes, and of the littleness of man!'

On one occasion he, the once so popular minister,

was actually hooted in the public streets, was surrounded by an angry mob, and had to be hurried into a private house to protect him from insult and attack. He found that his fame brought him no definable satisfaction. He learnt by experience that the higher is the mountain, the more violently do the storms burst upon it.

These were incidents in his public career. In his private life there were equally serious drawbacks, caused by the absorbing demands of his public position. He had little or no leisure, and was unable to find time for the intellectual pursuits and amusements in which he would otherwise have delighted. His marriage had unhappily been influenced by party considerations. He had wedded the daughter of a noble family, whose interest, he thought, would greatly aid him in his career of ambition. His wife was neither pre-eminently beautiful, nor gifted, nor high-minded. The one thing on which she prided herself was her aristocratic birth. She repelled by her chill hauteur many of his earlier friends, whom she regarded as plebeian ; and, worse than this, she skilfully contrived to keep at a distance the members of his own family of whose humbler position she felt ashamed. Faber had a loving heart, and as he could not let his family into the secrets of his wife's subtle manœuvres, he felt that they looked on him as one whose prosperity had made him ashamed of them. Nor did his wife's affection make up to him for what he had lost. She was virtuous, but of a cold disposition, and, though she

was proud of her distinguished husband, she could not become a real companion for him.

Worse still, his absences from home, his long foreign missions, and his incessant occupations made it impossible for him to see much of his children. In consequence of this he had but little influence over his boys, and he saw them growing up with tastes and opinions greatly unlike his own. His was a heart which yearned for sympathy, and the fact that even his sons seemed to know but little of his tenderness was a constant grief to him.

At last he became troubled with insomnia, and spent long nights unrefreshed in the worry of incessant cares. This made him intensely miserable, and wore out his strength before his time.

Even his triumphs gave him but little gratification. The novelty of power, the glamour of rank, were soon exhausted. If in one great speech or skilful combination he was successful, he had at once to consider the next. The publicity of his life palled upon him, and he was wearied with incessant appeals for his influence or his gifts. He felt it quite refreshing if here and there he found some man whose admiration and support were purely disinterested; who wanted nothing from him, but, loving him for his own sake, cared neither to court nor flatter him. He felt more and more isolated as time went on.

Worst of all, his cares and duties drove out of his mind the more serious concerns of a life beyond. Conscientious and honourable, he yet felt that he was

often tempted to strain his conscience, and dim the delicate bloom of his honour. He had thought of many needful things, but what if death should snatch him away from earthly business,

As a cross nurse might snatch a fretful child
From all his toys and baubles,

and surprise him amid entire neglect of the one thing which was most needful of all? He could not but feel that it would have been far better for him, if he had left the destinies of his life in higher hands, and the sad verses of a poet rang in his memory,

Aus der Jugendzeit, aus der Jugendzeit
Klingt ein Lied mir immerdar.
O wie liegt so weit, O wie liegt so weit
Was mein einst war!

While this mood was upon him, a period of rest became necessary to recruit his strength and bring back his vanished sleep.

He yearned to revisit the seaside village of which he had admired the secluded loveliness with his two friends in his happy youth. He went there, accompanied only by a young secretary who was sincerely attached to him, and, on the evening of his arrival, he wandered alone to the headland where he had made the choice which decided the destiny of his life.

It was a lovely peaceful evening. The quiet sea, almost unbroken by a ripple, lying under the crimson flood of sunset light, seemed to breathe from its broad expanse 'the ardours of rest and love.' He was no longer agile enough to climb down the rocks to the far

point where he had once meditated, but he went as near it as he could. He sat down full of melancholy and looked at the tulip mark on his breast. It was there; but it had lost its dazzling brightness. He sighed deeply. 'If I had the choice to make again,' he said to himself, 'should I choose power? I think not.'

'Would you rescind your wish?' said a low voice beside him. 'Would you resign its fruits? Should you be content after all to end your days forgotten and obscure?'

'What is there for me as it is?' he answered humbly, 'but

To leave a half-remembered name,
Cumbered with lies, and dark with shame?

Spirit, I have learned to distrust myself and my own ignorance; but, if it be good for me, recall thy gift; if not, let me humbly and bravely follow my own unwise choice to its predestined close.'

'Not every choice, not every act in life is past remedy in its final issues,' said the spirit gently. 'Open thy robe once more.' He touched him where the tulip was, and his touch seemed to be of ice. 'The sign is gone now,' he said. 'Return to the humble life, and seek for peace; take no step of thine own; all shall be arranged for thee.'

'I thank thee, spirit,' he murmured, and after a few more days of rest he returned home. Could he indeed give up his power and position without a pang? Yes. Had not one great emperor of the world found himself far happier in his self-corrected mind, when he was planting cabbages at Salona, than when he wielded the

imperial fasces of the world? And had not another, after laying aside the crown of many kingdoms, amused himself with making clocks, and, since he could make no two clocks keep the same time, learnt how impossible had been his effort to make all men take the same views of things as himself?

He returned to his place in the Senate, and rose to speak on a public measure of the highest importance. But while he spoke he felt his mind suddenly grow dim and confused. For the first time in his life he hesitated, stammered, lost the thread of his argument, talked nonsense, and at last, amid the profound and pained astonishment of his listeners, hopelessly broke down.

The next morning there was a leading article in the chief Porphyrian journal, contemptuously alluding to his failure, and remarking what a pity it was that men would not recognise in time their growing imbecility, but would cling to the gains of office long after they were incompetent to fulfil its duties.

Faber, to his own astonishment, read the article with a smile. The same day he wrote to resign his seat in the ministry. He retired into private life, and devoted himself without a regret to the study of literature, to the care of his family, to the good of his neighbours. He found in the shade of his garden a peace which the glare of fame had never given him. In the days of his immense power, in the days of his splendid success, he had never been ignoble, never once consciously dishonourable; but he had suffered the wings of his aspirations to be soiled as

are the wings of the eastern dove when she settles upon the dust-heaps of the villages ; and it is only when she soars again into the blue air and abounding sunshine that we see how she is ‘covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold.’ And now in his seclusion and dethronement as it were, he often murmured to himself the words of the ardent saint, *Deargentemus pennas* (‘Let us silver our soul’s wings’).

And one day when he heard his boys talking of their ambitious hopes he told them how once an old man had heard two youths sighing for fame, success, power, and had opened his arms wide three times and folded them again upon his breast. ‘Why do you do that?’ they inquired. ‘I have what you desired,’ said the old man ; ‘I have grasped the wind !’

He passed away in peace from a world in which he was already half forgotten ; and once when Fidelis, with whom he had always kept up his friendship, came to stay with him, and talked to him about his past career, he said, ‘Fidelis, I wonder whether you still retain your boyish fondness for the words of the poets ? If you do you will recall some familiar lines which will tell you all about me.’

‘I think I do,’ said Fidelis.

And then Faber, holding his hand in a friendly grasp, said in a low voice,

‘His overthrow heaped happiness upon him ;
For then, and not till then, he felt himself,
And found the blessedness of being little.
And, to add greater honours to his age
Than man could give him, he died fearing God.’

V

FESTUS

He feedeth on ashes : a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul.—*Is.* xliv. 20.

Tanto giù cadde, che tutti argomenti
Alla salute sua eran già corti.

DANTE, *Purg.* xxx. 136.

ON the career of Festus we will not dwell at length, for it was one of those deplorable and apparently irredeemable shipwrecks upon which the curtain ‘comes down with the rush of a storm,’ and leaves us silent. The thing which he had chosen was given him, but he had already had an intimation that ‘the gifts of the evil genii are curses in disguise.’ Almost immediately after his return to the great city, and before he had got accustomed to the wearying routine of business in which he had resentfully thought that his years would be spent, he received a letter to tell him that a distant relative, of whom he hardly knew anything, had died, and had most unexpectedly left him the heir to an immense fortune. The career of pleasure, or what he regarded as pleasure, was thus immediately open to him, and he eagerly embraced it. He at once entered into possession of a splendid town house, and of a mansion in the country, both of which, though they were already furnished with every luxury, he made still more sumptuous. He then plunged without restraint into a course of headlong dissipation. He lived

solely for amusement, for excitement, for selfish indulgence, for the gratification of his lowest self and his meanest impulses. His table was that of an epicure ; he drank habitually and to shameful excess the choicest wines ; he lived in the centre of a society of the gilded youth who acted on the notion that, life being short and death without remedy, the only object of human beings should be to make it less tedious, even though no more should remain of its transient mirth than of a mist smitten by the sun. Their practical exhortation to each other was, ‘ Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness ; let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place ; for this is our portion and our lot.’ Betting, gambling, racing, extravagance, the frequenting of low society, the hunting for new sensations, the devising of excitements ever more dubious and more disgraceful in their shamelessness, occupied their ill-spent and degraded days. At all innocence they sneered as at a mere hypocritical semblance, the infatuation of bigots and weaklings. For the loss of character they cared nothing, for they ostentatiously paraded the dissoluteness which they attempted to elevate into a new philosophy. They contented themselves with such society as they could find among those who were as abandoned and as shameless as themselves. Yet, after all, their days were unspeakably listless and weary, for even their most exciting dissipations soon palled upon them ; they were

the delights

That speedy die and turn to carrion.

A certain selfish and voluptuous king used sometimes to take one of his courtiers by the buttonhole and say to him, '*Ennuyons-nous ensemble.*' But Festus and his bad companions, hating any interspace of time which might leave them liable to guilty memories, silent self-reproach, and dark anticipations, tried to live in one whirl of excitement which, after all, they felt to be worse than pleasureless.

Not many years elapsed before the threshold of Festus, whether in town or country, had ceased to be passed by any high-minded man. His name among all those who honoured virtue became a byword of pity and contempt. He lived with loose inferiors—boon companions bound to him by associations of folly and of sin. As a matter of course he did not escape the consequences of his misdeeds.

He became prematurely old and prematurely grey. Soon nothing was left behind of his pleasures except the haggard misery they had wrought. His appetite was sated and jaded, and Pleasure could please no more. The world's experience has fixed on the right nomenclature for such lives and such self-avengers. They are lives of *dissipation*—that is, of utter rout and scattering of the true forces of existence. He who thus lives is a physical and a moral and spiritual bankrupt. He is a *roué*—broken on the wheel;—a *débauché*, a man swept away by the rushing tide of temptations which become as avenging furies to themselves, and appear to their victims no longer in radiant vesture, but with snaky hair and shaken torch.

The beauty of Festus had long vanished from his flaccid and unhealthy face. His strength was dried up like a potsherd; his health was undermined; he began, terribly early, to possess the sins of his youth. He was 'lord of himself' as he had chosen to make, or rather to unmake, himself; and he found it an heritage of unspeakable woe. And so, day by day, he sank down inevitably to the lowest depths. The sweeping whirlwind had burst upon the bark which had started in gilded trim, with youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm; and it was now a hopeless shipwreck.

Fidelis had barely seen him since their boyish tour; for Festus, when he had sprung into abnormal wealth, affected to look down upon his former companions, and neither Faber nor Fidelis cared to keep up any acquaintance with one who, defying all remonstrances, shamelessly set an execrable example and poisoned the moral atmosphere around him. But one day Fidelis received an urgent message that he would visit one of the wards of a great hospital, for a man who was very ill was urgently desirous to see him.

He went at once. In the miserable figure outstretched before him, he entirely failed to recognise his once bright and attractive schoolfellow. Festus fixed his gaze upon him and faintly whispered his name.

Fidelis looked at the sunk eyes; at the sallow and wasted cheeks; at the expression full of shame and weariness; at the unwholesome and degenerate face.

'Do you know me?' he asked in surprise. 'I do not remember you.'

‘Do you not?’ said Festus humbly. ‘I cannot wonder at it. Yet once, many years ago, we were equals and daily companions. And now my bad career is run, and I am here helpless, hopeless, homeless, friendless, penniless, in utter despair, and sick even unto death.’

‘Surely,’ answered Fidelis slowly, ‘surely this cannot be Festus?’

‘It is; or what was once Festus. *Miserrimus* would now be a better name. Oh, Fidelis,’ he said, ‘I remember that when we were happy boys together, you loved poetry. I recall some lines which a poet wrote on his thirty-sixth birthday, and they are frightfully true of me :

My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone ;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No warmth is kindled at the blaze—
A funeral pile.’

‘But how came you here? I thought you were very rich.’

‘I was; but my riches have long ago been evilly and senselessly squandered.’

‘Can I do anything to help you?’

‘I fear it is too late,’ moaned Festus. ‘The physician tells me that my life is in danger. Friends I have none. My few relatives have long disowned me. I felt so

unutterably wretched that I was filled with an intense yearning to see *one* good man, who had known me in better and happier days. You are very kind to have come to me.'

'I should have been very mean and selfish if I had not come,' said Fidelis. 'But now tell me what I can do to help or to comfort you.'

'Fidelis,' said Festus, 'you will perhaps hardly believe that years have passed since I have prayed, or ever even heard a prayer. I tried to forget the very existence of King Elyon. I have so long ceased to pray that I know not how. Will you kneel and pray for me?'

Fidelis knelt and prayed. Festus was too ill to say much, but he faintly moaned, 'Can there be any hope for such a one as I?'

'I trust in the mercy of Elyon,' said Fidelis, 'for ever and beyond.'

'May He be merciful to me the sinner!' said Festus, in a voice almost inaudible. He heaved a sigh and lay as one dead.

'You had better leave him now,' said the physician who was watching him. 'His strength is completely exhausted.'

Fidelis looked at him with deep compassion. He noticed with surprise a livid stain upon his breast. It bore the semblance of a withered, crumpled, leaden-coloured lotus flower.

VI

FIDELIS

A good man shall be satisfied from himself.—*Prov.* xiv. 14.

Libero, dritto, sano, è tuo arbitrio
E fallo fora non fare a suo senno ;
Per ch' io te sopra te corono e mitrio.

DANTE, *Purgat.* xxvii. 140.

WHEN Fidelis had returned with his two youthful companions to begin the business of his life, no such 'stroke of fortune,' as men call it, had occurred to him as to them. He had gone into business and his days were quietly occupied with its duties. He had set before himself the conviction that life is service. He believed that he was not meant to live for himself or as an isolated atom. He belonged to the great family of man, and thought that he could do nothing nobler or happier than to live and die for them. As a youth he did all he could in his leisure hours to brighten the days of the young, to uplift their aspirations, to make the wretched less miserable, and 'to add sunlight to daylight by making the happy happier.' He still set the same ideal before him when his diligence and faithfulness won for him trust and promotion, and through useful, uneventful years of peace and of duty, he rose step by step, slowly but surely, to easy competence, and then to as much wealth as he desired. He

married a wife of like mind with himself, and they two

Walked this world
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so through those dark gates across the wild
Which no man knows.

He lived among his children, enjoyed their happiness, tried to influence their lives for worthy aims. He did his utmost to 'lend ardour to virtue, and confidence to truth.'

Being fearless in the cause of righteousness, like every other true man, he did not escape the exasperated opposition of the votaries of shams, cruelty, and greed. Yet he was happy; for though at times he seemed to be walking with his head 'in a cloud of poisonous flies,' the humble consciousness of sincerity supported him, and he never ceased 'to wear the herb called heartsease in his bosom.'

No attacks made him swerve from the path of self-imposed duty, and, as years went on, his friends became ever more grateful and more numerous, and his enemies relapsed into silence from very shame.

His life was not, of course, exempt from those natural trials which come to all. To no man can life be like a summer holiday. But amid the trials which befall even the just and the upright there springs up always the panacea, the healing balm. There were many men much wealthier than Fidelis. He won for himself no distinguished honours; he earned no title, and very little public applause; but every day he was

useful to some one, and all his days were filled with little, unremembered, unconsidered, acts of kindness, and words and deeds of sympathy. Thus the life of Fidelis was full indeed of balm and blessedness. He gradually won general affection by his many unobtrusive benefactions. Multitudes in the Purple Island felt that they had been the better for his efforts, and love and honour lay like a beam of light athwart the sunset days of a life well spent. His name was mentioned with gratitude in the homes of those who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow. He knew by personal experience how truly

The high desire that others may be blest
Savours of heaven.

VII

io mi rendei
Piangendo a quei che volontier perdona.
Orribil furon li peccati miei,
Ma la bontà infinita ha sì gran braccia,
Che prende ciò, che si rivolge a lei.

DANTE, *Purgat.* iii. 120.

Yea, thou forgivest ; but with all forgiving
Canst not restore mine innocence again.—F. MYERS.

FESTUS had gained from the visit of Fidelis a fresh access of hope and strength. The dying flame of life seemed to leap up from its white embers as though for one last flickering gleam. It was even thought that he might partially recover, if he could be removed to

the seaside. Directly Fidelis heard this he furnished what was necessary to send him down to the village which he had visited in his youth, a place which he had expressed a yearning to see again, and where he could enjoy perfect quiet and the purest air.

On the same evening that Faber had been sitting on the rocks and had been permitted to reverse an unwise choice, Festus, very pale and very feeble, walked in the warm evening air to the spot on the green moss where he had sat on that former evening so long ago.

His mind was full of penitence and gloom as he sat looking on the sea, and revolving the memories of his life which were unspeakable for sadness. The brightness without, the waters flashing as with millions of diamonds, the clouds smitten here and there by the sunlight into flakes of rainbow, could not dispel the blackness of thick darkness within his soul. But suddenly he heard a laugh, merry but mocking, and Naama, whose evil fascination had planted the germs of ruin into his youth, gleamed before his eyes. Had she come to taunt him, to triumph over him? It was even so!

‘Well,’ she said, ‘see how fairly I have treated you! Your wish was fulfilled—was it not? You asked for pleasure; you have had it to the full. You have drunk the cup of enjoyment down to the bitter and ragged lees. You began as a fair youth; you end as a withered man. Have you enjoyed the boon I conferred on you?’

‘Avaunt, witch and demon!’ said Festus.

‘No, no!’ said Naama. ‘What! were you such a

fool as to think that you could commit the sin and not pay the penalty? Did none of your old books—I don't mean the lewd fictions,' she added with another laugh—'ever tell you that vice and punishment are twins, who walk the world with their heads tied together? Oh, fool, fool, fool!'

Festus was still silent, though his heart was breaking, for his conscience echoed the word 'fool.' Yes, and he felt that, as a fool, he had been filled with the fruit of his own devices.

'You have had your choice,' sneered the mocking spirit. 'It cannot be recalled; you are ours; and now I can reveal secrets, and show you what I am in my true shape. Look!'

The female form, the enchanting face, melted away, and Naama began before his eyes to assume her true and revolting aspect; a siren no longer, but a withered witch with distorted feet and yellow hands, hideous and execrable.

Festus rose with overpowering horror and affright, and, even as he rose, a voice, which thrilled through him like a lightning flash, exclaimed:

'Hence, evil one!'

As though smitten by a thunderbolt, Naama instantly vanished.

There was a pause which Festus dared not break, and then the voice, which had now changed to tones of the deepest compassion, seemed to say to him, 'The tender mercies of the demons are cruel, Festus, and their sorcery destructive.'

He turned. An old man stood beside him, and Festus fell upon his knees.

‘What fruit have you,’ asked the vision, ‘in those



FESTUS FELL UPON HIS KNEES

things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.’

‘Oh, to recall my choice! Oh, that I might have my youth again!’ moaned Festus.

‘That may not be!’ said the old man. ‘The past is irrevocable even by Omnipotence. The thing that hath been, remains.’

‘Then I am lost!’ murmured Festus. ‘I must depart into the everlasting night.’

‘Go forth into the night,’ said the sage, ‘but let it be to meet the morning dawn. Hast thou repented?’

‘I repent,’ said Festus. ‘I repent in dust and ashes. I abhor myself. But of what use is repentance? The sin has been committed; the leprous state remains. Oh!’ he cried in accents which could scarce find a passage through the sobs which shook his frame, as he flung himself prostrate upon his face, grasping the feet of his reprover and wetting them with tears, ‘I am undone, undone! Is there no mercy for such as I am?’

‘Rise, unhappy one,’ said the vision; ‘though the past is irrevocable, Elyon can give thee a present and a future. Though the old heart be corroded, he who made thee can create in thee a new heart, and a right spirit. Thou shalt have yet a few more years to live. Be much upon thy knees; seek for grace to purchase back the opportunity.’

‘O that thou wouldst give me some token for good, my father, O my father!’

‘I will,’ he said; and Festus felt on his breast the touch of the old man’s cleansing finger. It obliterated the wrinkled and lurid lotus flower, and left the mark

of a blood-red cross. Then he laid his hand on the head of the poor wretch, and the touch, as though surcharged with blessing, inspired him with the first gleam of hope which he had felt for many days. A sound was murmuring in his ears which seemed to say, 'Rejoice not over me, mine enemy, for when I fall I shall rise again.'

VIII

All his thoughts
Pleasant as roses in the thickets blown,
And pure as dew bathing their crimson leaves.

WORDSWORTH.

THAT same evening by another path Fidelis also had wandered to the top of the headland. He had not sat there many minutes when he was conscious of the Presence by his side.

'It is many years, my son,' said the sage with a smile, 'since you sat here last, and I was commissioned then to make you great offers. Do you regret that you refused them? You might have been rich, eminent, famous at a bound—and you are not!'

'But I am content,' said Fidelis, with a happy smile, 'and that is more than all. I have what has come to me by Elyon's blessing. I do not regret, my father, that I left the choice in higher hands. I have lived a very happy life.'

'Have you nothing to pray for?'

'Oh, many things,' said Fidelis, 'for myself and for

others continually. But for myself, my most frequent petition is this: "Grant me to do thy will, O Elyon, and give me what thou seest to be best."

'You could have offered no more blessed prayer,' said the sage. 'Let me look at the mark upon your breast.' He opened the robe of Fidelis. 'Ah!' he said, 'I see the pansy there. It has indeed been an amulet. Its colours are as bright and fresh as when I pressed them over your heart; nay, brighter and more heavenly is their beauty. Happy Fidelis! Farewell, we shall meet again. He who has been with you hitherto shall remain with you henceforth. We shall meet—I know you love the words of the poets, my son,' he added, with a smile—'we shall meet

'In regions calm, of blue and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
Which men call earth.'

The three who had been youths together chanced to die at about the same age.

For all three in the eventide there had been light, though the life of Fidelis only had continued its unbroken tenor and been golden from its beginning to its close.

Sì non si perde,
Che non possa tornar l' eterno amore,
Mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde.

DANTE, *Purgat.* iii. 133.

They met once more. It was on the dark barge, traversing the dark sea, and their eyes gazed together



TRAVERSING THE DARK SEA

on the one spot on the far horizon, where, to some happy eyes, it seemed as though a blaze of sunlight were burning for evermore.

‘Do you see yonder flood of light?’ asked Fidelis joyfully, pointing to it with his finger.

‘I do!’ said Faber in a voice of thanksgiving.

Festus raised his hands to his eyes and gazed long.

‘My eyes,’ he murmured, ‘are very, very dim; but I think—or almost think—that I can see a distant glimmer.’

*THE FORTUNES OF A ROYAL HOUSE*¹

I

THE PALACE OF KING DORESS

This should have been a noble creature. He
Hath all the energy which should have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled ; as it is,
It is an awful chaos—light and darkness
And mind and dust.—BYRON, *Manfred*.

THE demon Ashmod was so deadly a foe of the Porphyrian race that he was usually known as ‘The Enemy,’ as though there were no other. Now Ashmod had acquired many thousands of years’ experience of the nature of life in the Purple Island. He was consequently well aware that prosperity, though it went by the name of ‘felicity,’ and caused men to receive the ‘felicitations’ of the multitude, was often leagues apart from happiness. Yet to a nature like his, cankered

¹ In this allegory some readers will recognise an underlying basis of historic incidents ; but the characters and scenes are almost entirely imaginary. Prince Innocens and other characters had no historic existence.

through and through with envy, even earthly prosperity was an intolerable spectacle. He never saw it without a mad desire to undermine and destroy it.

Now if ever there was a king who seemed to have climbed the summits of human prosperity, it was King Doress the Magnificent.

He had not been born a king, but had risen to the throne by a combination of warlike genius and superb endowments. He was exceptionally beautiful. He was also a superb athlete and marvellously fearless. His arrow would pierce the distant gazelle with unerring aim, and he would face the lion with a smile certain to transfix its heart with his mighty javelin. In ability he towered far above his contemporaries; his talents were of the most versatile description; he had an instinctive genius for the arts alike of war and peace. Above all, he had a truly wonderful gift of winning his way to the confidence of the greatest rulers of the world, and owed much to the favour and friendship of the mighty Emperor of Dumi. Step by step he climbed the height of power, aided by marriage with a lovely princess of an old but banished royal line, for whose sake he had repudiated his former wife, and had sent away his eldest son, Ambivius, to be educated for a private career.

Doress had risen to the throne of Elkuds. Never did earthly sovereign reign more royally. His wealth seemed inexhaustible and he lavished it both on his own subjects and on adjacent lands. He decorated city after city with palaces of white marble and

‘imperial mantles of proud towers.’ In every city he visited, in every land through which he travelled, it might have seemed as if all the inhabitants were suplicants for his lavish bounty, and poured their choicest honours at his feet.

The foreign kings or potentates who were his frequent guests went away amazed and envious at a splendour which they could not emulate. It was specially displayed in the palace which was his favourite residence. This royal residence was ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion. The figures, carved with choicest skill upon its architraves, shone with gilt and blue and crimson. The pillars were of rare marble—purple and green and gold and rose-colour. The floors were of the same lustrous materials, and looked like mosaics of jewels. The banquet rooms were hung with silken tapestries and hangings of sea-purple, and were lighted either with huge candelabra of gold, of which the like was never seen, or with statues of youths in gold and silver, holding brilliant lamps in their hands. The tables groaned under their load of plate, wrought in artistic forms and chased with exquisite designs, and these were upheaped with all kinds of delicious dainties—

Candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon.

As the guests lay on their sumptuous couches, they were waited on by pages, with their long fair hair crowned with flowers, who had been bought for their beauty in far-off lands. All round the halls stood

soldiers, splendidly accoutred and tall of stature, who formed the foreign body-guard of this great king.

Ashmod was well aware that all this gorgeous materialism, so far from hindering, tended to further his designs of entangling the souls of King Elyon's children in earthliness and sensualism, and making them more liable to become his own slaves. Yet he looked with so rancorous an envy on anything in any Porphyrian which bore even the external semblance of aught but misery, that since King Doress the Magnificent still manifested some laudable qualities, the demon was spitefully and passionately desirous to overwhelm him under floods of misfortune and drive him for ever, if it were possible, from King Elyon's love.

He summoned his henchman, Yetser Hara, and, pointing to the palace of King Doress, said, 'I loathe it all. Blight it for me!'

'I do not think it will be difficult,' said Hara. 'Several of the dwellers in that abode are ripe for my machinations in various ways, and I have fiends already in training to entice them.'

Before we hear of Hara's plans, we must first mention the members of the family of Doress who were denizens of his palace. There was his favourite sister, the Lady Pacifica; there was Queen Leila, his bride, who was the loveliest woman in all the world; and he had two sons living with him—very princely boys—Prince Hilaris and Prince Innocens.

'What will you give me,' said Hara, 'if I make that palace, which is the most splendid on earth, a

chaos of hatreds, a torture chamber, shambles red with massacres, a place resounding with the dismal shrieks of all the furies? What reward will you promise me if I deal with those lovely and royal creatures, and make them so miserable that they shall almost wish themselves to be with you in Pandemonium?’

‘Do that,’ said Ashmod, ‘and I will promise you a throne not even second to that of Prince Zebul.’

‘Agreed!’ said Hara. ‘My success is certain.’

‘How?’

‘To King Doress I shall assign the grim and restless demon of Suspicion; to Queen Leila the demon of Haughty Disdain; to Pacifica the green-eyed demon of Jealousy, who shall pass from one to the other. For the ruin of Hilaris the imp of Heedless Folly will for the present suffice; and to the eldest son, Ambivius, whom I shall manage to get summoned home, I will assign the fiery and insatiable fiend of Unscrupulous Ambition.’

‘You have not mentioned Prince Innocens,’ said Ashmod.

‘I know it; I can at present do nothing with him.’

Ashmod warmly commended Hara for his plan. We shall see how it worked.

The demons, as we have already noticed, have too much experience to precipitate their operations. They approach their victims with the noiseless sinuous glide of a serpent—the serpent which looks like a dead and

slumbrous thing, and yet can 'outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, crush the tiger; and, before we have time to think, we are fascinated and bewildered; its coils rapidly gather round us, and its stroke flashes poison through our blood.' It is only at later phases in the soul's history that the fiends know the best time to crash out of the dark forest of temptation with the glare and roar of the wild beast bounding on his prey.

For a time the palace of King Doress the Magnificent might have been (as indeed it was) the envy of the world. The populace admired its splendid inhabitants, those imperially moulded men and lovely women, and fair youths, who rode forth from its porch to the chase or to the games, surrounded by the utmost pomp and prodigality of royal state. But, unseen, the evil spirits were moving in the midst of it, and sowing the invisible germs which should burst forth in the future whirlwind.

Up to this time King Doress had lived a life in which many munificent and kindly deeds had not as yet been stained with any unpardonable crime; but, unobserved by any, the fiends of Pride and Suspicion and Jealousy were daily working in the dark corners of his palace.

There would be much to tell of his fortunes, but we have mainly to do with the story of his sons. We shall therefore pass over some crimes into which the King was hurried by his proud, passionate, suspicious nature, above all the crowning crime which had led him to

suffer his whole soul to be poisoned against his wife Queen Leila, until at last, under a false accusation, he had ordered her execution—an atrocity which for years afterwards poisoned his soul with remorse as bitter as it was unavailing.

II

THE THREE PRINCES

If thou wouldst see the star of thy destiny, look for it in thine own heart.

FOR some years after this crime Doress was suffered to pursue his career of outward success and splendour undisturbed. He was victorious in war, munificent in peace, and the palace continued for a time in comparative calm. But it was only because the unseen demons felt secure of him, only because they knew that his heart was secretly turned to idols, that for a little while they let him alone.

For a little while only. Years sped on, and the two young princes, sons of the King by Leila—Prince Hilaris and Prince Innocens—were growing up. Hara and his confederates felt that it was time for them to renew active measures.

Prince Hilaris was a youth of eighteen. He was not ill-intentioned, but he was somewhat weak. His fault and peril was that he was too much given to frivolity, and had by no means realised that life is a very serious thing. His father with amazing magnificence had married him to the daughter of a

neighbouring King; unhappily she was, like her husband, of a careless temperament.

Prince Innocens, on the other hand, seemed to have inherited all the best qualities of King Doress and Queen Leila, and none of the evil ones. He was now a boy of fifteen. His bright face, his golden hair were pleasant to look upon, and his singular blamelessness, joined to a most unselfish and affectionate nature, made him the beloved of all. Even the stern moods of his father, his fits of suspicious jealousy, his bursts of uncontrollable anger, were calmed to gentleness when this his favourite boy sat at the foot of his royal chair, and the King's hand was resting lovingly upon his head, as it had so often done when he was still a child.

All might now have been well, or comparatively well, as far as outward events were concerned, in the palace of King Doress, if those who were its denizens had but taken to themselves the shield of faith and the panoply of watchfulness, and refused to leave any place in their souls for the malignant attacks of the evil demons. But when the subterranean depths of human hearts are surcharged with volcanic fires, the evil ones below sit 'nursing the impatient earthquake.'

The King often lent his ear to his sister, the Lady Pacifica, who was the *âme damnée* of his house. It was impossible for her cordially to like the two young Princes. They were her nephews—but were they not sons of Queen Leila, who was now dead, but whom she had hated for her pride? Besides this, Pacifica had sons of her own, and was specially devoted to Philip

her eldest born. If these young rivals could be swept out of her path, who could tell but what she might yet live to see Philip nominated heir to King Doress and his splendid crown?

III

Gefährlich ist mit Geistern sich gesellen.—GOETHE.

HERE then were promising materials on which Hara could work. He summoned the evil spirits who were under his command and consulted with them.

‘There is yet more to be done,’ he said, ‘in the palace of Doress. Who will take in hand the Lady Pacifica?’

‘She does not want much taking in hand,’ said Echthos, the spirit of Hatred. ‘She has long ago given her secret signature to my bond.’

‘And I will help Echthos in any plan he has,’ said Eris, the spirit of Ambition and Discord.

‘Very well,’ said Hara, ‘and several of you already have your hold on Doress, so that *he* will not give us any trouble. But now what is to be done with Prince Hilaris?’

‘I have made a little way with him,’ said Elaphros, the young and comparatively harmless imp of Levity. ‘I can induce him to blurt out all sorts of dangerous speeches without thinking, and his young wife is so like him that the two together may cause endless mischief.’



DORESS AND INNOCENS



‘And in that matter I can be of the greatest use,’ said another young imp, whose name was Psithuros, the spirit of Whisperings.

‘Good, you pretty little imps of darkness,’ said Hara.

‘When they have done their little best,’ said Iggereth, the demon of Perverted Aims, with some contempt, ‘I shall be ready for more serious business.’

‘But now, what about Prince Innocens?’ asked Hara.

Devils, and demons, and imps alike were silent.

‘What?’ said Hara. ‘Are all of you so completely defeated by one young Porphyrian boy? I hate Prince Innocens. I would rather drag him down than any one.’

‘We can do no good with *him*,’ said one after another sullenly.

‘Hatob is always with that boy,’ said Lilith. ‘They walk hand in hand. If one of us does but show himself he instantly calls out to Hatob in alarm, and says that he has been frightened by an ugly face. He says so even if *I* appear to him; and you all know that I am beautiful. Even such mere children as Elaphros and Psithuros alarm him.’

‘Yes,’ said Psithuros, ‘for one day when I had got among his friends he suddenly ceased talking and went out. And I once heard him tell Hatob that it made him afraid to think that evil spirits were on the watch to lead him astray; and Hatob answered that neither he nor any one need be in the smallest degree alarmed,

since no evil spirit would touch, much less hurt, any one, however young, who would refuse to have anything to do with them.'

'Cease, you silly chatterer!' said Eris. 'We all know that, and don't want to listen to Hatob's sermons here.'

'How do you account for it?' asked Hara. 'It is most exceptional when any young Porphyrian has so little part in me.'

'I will tell you,' murmured Echthos. 'King Doress has a very distant and mysterious palace in the hills where saints and prophets are buried. In the garden of this palace grows a herb, rare as the mandrake. It is called CEnaris. Its root is of flame-colour, and on the darkest night it is beautifully luminous. But it requires a trained and delicate eye to see this pure flame. To most people it looks a common plant enough, and numbers who have suspected that it has some magic power have pulled it, and hacked at it, and bragged about it, and turned it to the silliest material uses. But I happen to know that when Innocens was fourteen, Hatob had long and earnest talks with him, and the Prince grew even more serious than he was before, and then Hatob showed him this plant, and how to use it; and it has been a potent amulet against all our snares.'

'Yes,' said Naama, 'and Elyon has given him the not uncommon sapphire ring which he gave to Aner. On the fingers of most who wear it, it soon grows white, or at the best pale enough; but on *his* finger it is still of the deepest blue.'

‘I know,’ said Lilith; ‘he is one of Elyon’s special favourites.’

‘For the present,’ said many voices, ‘we must leave Sir Innocens alone. Some day perhaps one or other of us—you, Naama, have the best chance—may find him off his guard, and then!’

All that the demons said was true; for the boy’s name was a reflex of his character, and he had given his heart to Elyon. The use which he made of the herb Cœnaris was to place his young life of temperance, soberness, and chastity under the guardianship of heavenly powers.

‘Ah! but,’ said Hara, ‘I have another card to play in the palace of Doress.’

‘What is that?’ they asked inquisitively.

‘There is the eldest son of Doress—Ambivius.’

His name was received by the demons with peals of malignant laughter.

‘Ambivius—oh, he is mine already, heart and soul,’ said Lilith.

‘And ours too,’ chimed in Naama and Iggereth in one breath.

‘And mine’—‘And mine’—‘And mine,’ said the demons of Treachery and Hatred, and Baseness and Ambition.

‘But he lives far away,’ said Phobos, the spirit of Timidity. ‘He is not in the palace, or he would be a most serviceable aid to us; much more than a counterpoise to that hateful boy, Prince Innocens.’

‘Leave that to me! I will manage that,’ said Hara; and the conclave of demons broke up.

IV

Whispering tongues will poison truth.—COLERIDGE.

‘THE Lady Pacifica,’ said the page in waiting; and the sister of Doress sailed into the audience chamber of the King in her jewelled apparel.

‘You don’t often pay me a visit, Pacifica,’ said Doress; ‘and you are like a bird of evil omen—when ever you come to me in state I always feel sure that there is something wrong.’

‘I never say anything which I do not think necessary for your Majesty’s happiness, brother,’ she answered. ‘A great king is always surrounded by enemies, and sometimes they are of his own household.’

‘What is the matter now?’ asked Doress, drawing his brows into the terrible frown which portended a burst of wrath.

‘I am not quite satisfied with the doings either of your son Hilaris or his wife,’ said Pacifica.

‘He never had too much brains,’ said Doress; ‘and as for her, she is insignificant.’

‘If they were not very silly,’ said Pacifica, ‘she would hardly venture publicly to repeat the gossip of the backstairs, and laugh at you for dyeing your hair, and using cosmetics as she says you do.’

King Doress felt that this was beneath his contempt. ‘Never mind her chatter,’ he said; ‘she is a fool.’

‘Yes, but even fools can scatter firebrands.’

‘What has Hilaris been doing? I can soon reduce *him* to order.’

‘Is he so certain of the crown when you die, Doress,’ asked Pacifica, ‘that you are not even to have a voice in the matter?’

‘I can leave the crown to whom I choose, and, if I choose, can divide my kingdom into parts.’

‘Exactly so; then I do not think that the phrase, “When I am king,” should be so habitually on his lips.’

‘Certainly not.’

‘He builds,’ said Pacifica, ‘on his being the son of Leila. He poses as the scion of what he calls the genuine royal line.’

‘Has he the presumption, the puppy?’ said Doress angrily.

‘Indeed he has. Your own son is being set up as your rival. The people, devoted to the ancient line of princes, dare not speak openly, but are discussing in treasonable enigmas whether a pure stream of water may not come out of an entirely new channel; and whether the son of a daughter has not as much right as the son of a son—and so on.’

‘The old royal line were mere nobodies compared with me,’ said the King.

‘And that is the very reason,’ answered Pacifica, ‘why Hilaris should be more proud of you, and not harp so incessantly upon them’

Doress grew more and more angry. ‘I will have him thrown into prison,’ he said.

‘No!’ said Pacifica, ‘do nothing rash. Let us have

no more scandals in the family; we have had enough already.'

'Silence!' thundered Doress, who could not endure the slightest reference to the crimes of his past years.

'Pardon, your Majesty!' said Pacifica. 'I only spoke rashly out of my loyalty; but—may I advise?'

'Yes.'

'Then summon home your eldest son, Ambivius. You have not seen him for years. After all he *is* your eldest son, and he might prove himself a salutary counterpoise to the insolence of Hilaris towards the members of your own family.'

'Insolence?'

'Well, I do not know whether you call this insolence or not, but when he and his wife are surrounded by their parasites, who are far more numerous than yours, how do you think they speak of *me*, and my son Philip, and your other relatives? The young lady always stigmatises us as "that plebeian lot."'

'If *you* are plebeian, *I* am plebeian,' said Doress with a roar like that of a lion.

'Oh, pray do not get angry, brother! Hilaris only says that *when you die*—a common phrase of his'—(Pacifica lingered over the phrase)—'he means to strip me and my daughters of our fine robes, and make us card wool. Our male relatives are to be turned into slaves or common soldiers. Perhaps my good son Philip may rise to be a centurion, if he is very submissive.'

King Doress was pacing the room in his fury, and Pacifica saw that it was time to go.

‘Check your wrath, brother,’ she said; ‘only send for Ambivius, and give him the title of Prince. That will be quite sufficient at present: unless you would like to confer the same honour on your nephew Philip.’

Soon after Pacifica had left him, the King received his usual daily visit from Prince Hilaris. He received the youth roughly and contemptuously. Hilaris, who really loved his father, was deeply hurt.

‘Have I done anything wrong, sir?’ he asked.

‘Wrong? Yes!’ said the King. ‘How dare you presume to set yourself up among the people as a rival to me? How dare you insult my family, which is also *your* family? I will tame your insolence, boy. Out of my sight! And let your wife curb her silly tongue also, or it will be the worse for her.’

Hilaris stood amazed. Who could have been telling lies of him? Who could have been repeating his light and half-playful remarks? He would have spoken; but his father cut him short so imperiously with the order, ‘Get out of my sight!’ that he hurriedly left the room.

The little imp Psithuros, who stood on a perch in the disguise of the King’s favourite parrot, looked on at the scene with delight, and retailed it afterwards to Hara with shouts of laughter.

But the imp fled away when Prince Innocens entered.

The boy usually received a most cordial welcome from his father; but not so to-day. Doress in his fierce mood remembered that Innocens also had in his veins

the blood of the old royal line, and might hereafter be set up as a sort of rival to himself. He pushed his son away, and did not return his greeting.

‘Father!’ said Innocens astonished, ‘what is the matter?’

‘Matter enough! As if I were not sufficiently burdened by affairs of state without being plagued by ungrateful sons.’

‘Ungrateful, father? What can I possibly have done to vex you so much?’

‘Oh, I suppose you are in league with Hilaris against me. You think that I am getting old, and that you will have fine times when he is king.’

‘Father,’ said the boy, boldly seizing his reluctant hand, and looking up into his face with his fearless blue eyes, ‘you have always been kind and indulgent to me. I love Hilaris, but what could he possibly do for me more than you have done—or as much? In league with Hilaris against you? Oh, father’—for by this time the boy’s guileless pleading had charmed the frowning face of Doress into a smile—‘how can you talk such nonsense?’

‘There!’ said Doress, laughing in spite of himself, ‘a mere hop o’ my thumb like you is impudent enough to tell the King his father that he talks nonsense!’

‘And so you do,’ said Innocens, kissing him; and Doress could not forbear from returning the kiss, and clasping his son to his heart. But the moody fit speedily came back upon him like a cloud over the sunshine.

‘Then you have not joined with Hilaris in insulting the Lady Pacifica, or talking of my family as plebeian?’

‘Father, how can you?’ said Innocens reproachfully. ‘Why does a great king like you listen to such idle tittle-tattle?’

‘Dearest son,’ said Doress, ‘you can say what you like to me, for I believe that you are good and true, and that you really love me for my own sake as few do. But Hilaris is not like you.’

‘Ah, do not separate us in that way, father! We are brothers. We love each other, and we both love *you*.’

‘Yet tell me, Innocens, have you never heard him talk in that style?’

‘Never, father,’ said Innocens, looking up frankly into his eyes. ‘But even if I had, I should have put it down as nonsense, quite harmless. Hilaris talks and talks—especially when his heart is merry—and he means nothing. You know, father, that other people as well as Hilaris can talk nonsense *sometimes*,’ he said with a demure smile.

Innocens in his transparent simplicity had charmed away the fierceness of the King’s wrath. ‘You are a dear little fellow,’ said King Doress, ‘in spite of your impudence.’

‘Thank you, father,’ he said, ‘for saying that. And you are a dear old king for letting your foolish boy tell you that you talk nonsense. Kiss me again, and give me your blessing.’

Doress did so, and, as the boy reached the door, he turned round, fixed his earnest gaze upon him, and said :

‘ But, dear father, do not listen to gossips who would poison your kind heart against your sons.’

V

Eheu, quid volui misero mihi ? floribus austrum
Perditus et liquidis immisi fontibus apros.

VIRG. *Ecl.* ii. 58.

FOR a time the sweet influence of Innocens prevailed. The King dismissed his gloomy and suspicious jealousies ; but they had been indulged too often to loosen their hold finally. They returned upon him like a flood. He did not take Pacifica’s hint, and deeply vexed both her and her son by not putting Philip in the line of succession and allowing him the title of prince ; but he did despatch an order to Ambivius to come to the palace. The day before his arrival, he said to Hilaris and Innocens :

‘ Boys, your elder brother, Ambivius, whom you have not seen, will arrive to-morrow. Receive him, I bid you, in all respects as your equal, and as your elder brother ; and remember that I give to him also the title of prince, and regard him as the possible heir, or coheir, of my kingdom.’

Next day when the young princes paid him their morning visit, he tried to ascertain their feelings.

‘I will obey your commands, sir,’ said Hilaris, whom his wife had, however, made to feel that the summons to Ambivius materially altered her position and prospects.

‘And you, my Innocens?’

‘I shall be as formidable to him as I am to you, father,’ he said, laughing, ‘and if he ever talks nonsense I shall tell him so.’

VI

O purblind race of miserable men !
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves
By taking true for false, and false for true !
Here in this mirky twilight of the world
Groping :—how many !—TENNYSON.

AMBIVIUS—or, as we must now call him, the Prince Ambivius—was introduced into the court with great formality. His father sent an escort to meet him, and all the drums were beating, and the trumpets sounded a triumphant fanfare as he entered the palace court in one of the royal chariots surrounded by a glittering escort of the King’s bodyguard. He was undeniably handsome ; and when his face was wreathed with winning smiles, he made, at first sight, a favourable impression. Yet several of Ashmod’s demons, who were looking on in various disguises—some perched like ravens on the trees, others flitting hither and thither like bright-coloured birds—laughed and screeched to each other in

the notes of their own secret language, and said, ' We shall have little to do now that Ambivius is here.'

His prime and immediate object was to ingratiate himself with the King, from whose presence he had been secluded for many years. When he entered the audience chamber of Doress he fell gracefully and most humbly on his knee, and bent his head. He spoke in low respectful words, which seemed to be trembling with affection. Afterwards, day by day, at banquets, and whenever he was in his father's presence, he watched his least movements and seemed eager to anticipate his slightest wish. He laid himself out sedulously to amuse the King's family and guests by his brightness, geniality, and wit. This he could well do, for he had inherited much of the King's ability, and his intellectual gifts and versatility were far superior to those of his two brothers. He was such a gain to the society of the court that he was never omitted from the King's public hospitalities, and was constantly summoned to his private society. Later on, as he saw himself gaining in the affections of Doress, he began to seek his society uninvited, which few of the royal family ventured to do, and he used his best exertions to dissipate the monarch's frequent ennui. After that, he would even come to his bedchamber to inquire after his safety with the utmost solicitude, and he asked if he might not act as Page of the Chamber, so as to be the faithful guardian of the King's slumbers. At last—which was what he had been aiming at—Doress gave him his unbounded confidence.

His simultaneous efforts were devoted to win all the other members of the royal family, and to become their chief favourite. For his ultimate aim was in due time to oust and get rid of his two brothers, and make himself the heir of Doress as sole king of the whole realm of Elkuds.

He first laid siege to Prince Hilaris; sought his society; flattered him; treated him with a charming mixture of deference and familiarity, always affecting to regard him as his unquestioned superior; asked his advice, tried in every way to bring him out, to worm his way into his secrets, and unobserved to mould his thoughts and elicit his most perilous confidences, though nothing seemed to be farther from his intentions. Ambivius was a consummate master in the arts of treacherous hypocrisy, while he tried to wear the aspect of simplicity itself. The unhappy Hilaris came to look upon this his deadliest enemy as his truest friend, and both he and his young wife regarded him as the one person to whom they might say everything with the certainty that he would neither betray nor misuse their frankness.

At the same time he set himself to win the Lady Pacifica. Did he not belong to *her* family, the genuine family of King Doress? There was no fear that *he* would give himself any supercilious airs, or profess to look down on the sons and daughters of his aunt as though they came of a race inferior to his own. He subtly made Pacifica feel that her interests, and those of her children, were closely identified with his. He

paid special court to her eldest son Philip. Without saying anything which could be taken hold of, he somehow created in Philip's mind the conviction that, if he and his wife Rhoda would ally themselves in a close secret alliance with him, they might one day share his future kingdom. Ambivius seemed to have some mysterious power of impressing his thoughts upon others without clothing them in express words. He was a master of hints, and turns of expression which seemed to say one thing, and yet conveyed the very opposite. Philip and Rhoda, with the full approval of their mother, became his unconscious tools and practical bond-slaves.

There was only one member of the court with whom he completely failed. He would have made any sacrifice to master the mind of young Prince Innocens as he had mastered the wills of the others. He flashed upon the boy all his chameleon colours; he assumed the guise of beautiful ingenuousness; he gave the young Prince his choicest gifts; murmured in his ear his most delicately modulated flatteries; exercised all his blandishments. His failure was complete, for the boy.

was innocent ;

And to be innocent is nature's wisdom.

The hedge-dove knows the prowlers of the air,
Feared soon as seen, and flutters back to shelter ;
And the young steed recoils upon its haunches,
The never-yet-seen adder's hiss first heard.

Oh, surer than Suspicion's hundred eyes
Is that fine sense which to the pure in heart,
By mere oppugnancy of their own goodness,
Reveals the approach of evil.

Innocens was cold to all the fascinations of Ambivius. He put aside his flatteries, did his best to refuse his gifts, and, as far as was consistent with courtesy, tried to avoid his society, and to escape sitting next to him, or listening to his conversation. Ambivius would dearly have loved to plant some secret germs of deterioration in the lad's character. But he found him unassailable in the triple steel of guilelessness. Was it the herb *Ænaris*, which he kept in constant use, which protected him

'Gainst all enchantments, mildew, blast, or damp,
And ghastly furies' apparition ;

or was it that, when Ambivius was trying to get hold of him, his ring seemed to wear a less vivid blue, and he became sensible of the thrill and flash of Hatob's unspoken warnings? Whatever may have been the cause, certain it is that, long before Ambivius was found out by any one else, Innocens saw through him. He said nothing, but regarded him as a wily and dangerous conspirator, and almost shuddered at the presence which every one else seemed to welcome.

Doress the Magnificent was delighted with the success of his plan. Ambivius was clearly the ablest of his sons, and was also the most ostensibly loving. He congratulated himself on his wisdom in sending for a youth of whose filial devotion he might be proud, and whom he fancied that he could implicitly trust.

O caecas hominum mentes ! O pectora caeca !

Doress asked Pacifica and her son Philip their opinion of Ambivius. They were warm in his praises.

‘A true scion of *our* family,’ said Pacifica with emphasis.

Doress asked Prince Hilaris what he thought of his brother.

‘I like him extremely,’ said Hilaris. ‘He is more than a brother, he is a true friend.’

O caecas hominum mentes! O pectora caeca!

Somehow the King had divined or suspected that his beloved young Innocens did not quite feel the same warm enthusiasm for this new member of the family.

‘My Innocens,’ he said to him, ‘I hope you find your new brother as delightful as Hilaris, and as all the others do.’

‘Do they find him delightful?’ asked the boy, with that ingenuous blush which always betrayed his sensibility.

‘And do not you?’ asked Doress.

‘He seems to wish to be kind,’ said Innocens. ‘He tries to make himself agreeable. He offers me valuable presents.’

‘That is very good of him, seeing that you are so much younger,’ said the King.

Innocens was silent.

‘Oh, my boy,’ said Doress, ‘for the first time I feel a little ashamed of you. You are evidently jealous. I should not have thought it of you!’

‘Jealous, father? Certainly not *that*. I am quite sure that he has not robbed me of any of your love.’

‘*Robbed* you, Innocens? Why, he has a kind word for everybody; but perhaps you are afraid that he will now inherit a large share of my kingdom, and leave all the less for you?’

Innocens laughed aloud. ‘Oh, how little your Majesty understands me!’ he said. ‘Come, father; my room is close by. You don’t visit me there as often as you ought to do. I feel inclined to scold you, and I want to show you something.’

He took the King by the hand and led him to his room, and pointed to one of the windows. Doress looked with curiosity on the glass.

Innocens had engraved, with the diamond of a ring which his father had given him, the words, which an unhappy English princess cut many hundreds of years afterwards on the window of her castle-chamber, ‘O keep me innocent; make others great!’

‘There, father,’ he said; ‘I scratched that prayer on the window, with the diamond of the ring you gave me, when I was fourteen years old. Whoever may desire the splendours of royalty, I do not. Never think of me as an heir, father; love me as a dear son.’

‘I do! I do!’ said the King, much moved. ‘I cannot explain your obvious dislike of Ambivius, and I am sorry for it. You usually see the best side of everybody. I cannot account for the prejudice. But you are the dearest of boys, and your father will always love you.’

VII

He aids

The friends who drudge for him, as the blind man
Was aided by his guide, who lent his shoulder
O'er rough and smooth until he reach'd the brink
Of the far precipice : then hurled him downward.—*Old Play.*

AMBIVIVUS had now planted his foot deep into the affairs of the palace of Elkuds. He never lost sight of his ulterior aims. He cared for no human being but himself. Vice, and crime, and treachery were words which for him had no meaning. One thing he meant to do, which was to make himself the sole undisputed monarch of Elkuds, and then to revel in every luxury and indulgence which wealth and sovereignty and gratified ambition could bestow upon him. He looked down on all the personages around him as his inferiors. He despised King Doress, while he fooled him to the top of his bent. He despised the Lady Pacifica; he specially despised Prince Hilaris. He would play on them all as if they were his instruments, and mould them to his purposes exactly as he liked. He did not at all despise Prince Innocens, but hated and feared him. In the presence of that blameless boy his dark genius felt rebuked. Innocens could not be got rid of by entangling him in real plots, or overwhelming him with suborned perjuries. But . . . well, well, Innocens could wait. He was not generally suspicious, and were there not such things as poisons, which might be used

when the other plans of Ambivius had succeeded, as succeed he felt sure they would?

And being now a most powerful and popular personage—far more really influential than Prince Hilaris, though he had always been hitherto regarded as the heir to the crown—Ambivius began to set into active motion his sinister designs. If he had deceived the greatest, nothing was easier to him than to enlist in his interest a swarm of inferior persons. He was always a kind and condescending master to his slaves. It suited him to make them all think that he had a personal regard for them, and felt a personal interest in them. In this way he established a subterranean ascendancy over them, which made them his unscrupulous agents without seeming to be so, and enabled him to secure their incessant help in plans which they could not fathom. On all sorts of pretences of affection for Hilaris, and as though his sole wish was to protect him, he surrounded him—and indeed all others except Innocens, of whom no spy could ever find anything to report—with a swarm of spies. The whole palace buzzed with whisperhood, and clacked with gossip. Everything which the King did or said, however secretly, somehow found its way to the ears of Ambivius. As for poor Prince Hilaris, he could scarcely smile, or yawn, or make a joke, or raise his hand to his head without Ambivius being informed of it. Indeed, Ambivius had laid himself out specially to win and bribe the confidential page and secretary of the Prince so that he never wrote a note of which the silken band

was not unloosed, or the seal broken and counterfeited before it reached its destination. The close alliance between Ambivius and Philip, the elder son of Pacifica, made him familiar with the most intimate secrets of her household also.

The Lady Pacifica was the chief instrument whom he employed to insinuate into the King's mind the most angry suspicions of Hilaris. Garbled quotations of what he had said; downright inventions of what he had not said; harmless jests into which might be read a sinister meaning—all found their way through the spies of Ambivius to Philip, through Philip to Pacifica, and through Pacifica to the King. When Doress mentioned these to Ambivius, it was always this impostor's aim to make them tell with deadliest force while yet he assumed the *rôle* of the defender of his dear brother, and the palliator of all his offences. He often posed as an intercessor between him and his incensed father. Yet all the while he was accomplishing his secret object of enhancing his own apparent merits, and leaving the King more furious against Hilaris, and more convinced that the harmless youth was a secret traitor.

Ambivius did all this so well, and was so entirely unsuspected, that, on one occasion, the two young fiends, Eris and Psithuros, laughed outright, and noiselessly remarked to each other that some day Ambivius would be a most effectual ally in the demon coterie of Ashmod—perhaps almost a rival to Hara himself! And as for Ambivius, when he left the

presence of Doress, he too laughed in his evil heart, and said, 'Thanks to my good management I now have all the threads of the web in my own hands, and my success is certain. I shall be king—and then!'

And thus the unfortunate Hilaris, who had neither the desire nor the capacity to become a conspirator, was gradually entangled hand and foot in a stake-net of destruction.

VIII

What wounds sorer than an evil tongue?—PHILLIPS.

FOR now the hapless Prince, undermined by the brother whom he regarded as his best friend, was constantly received by his father with coldness, or with frowns and black looks, or with bursts of ill-humour and contemptuous taunts; and these gradually passed, first into veiled, then into open threats. The whole nature of the young man—which was frank and harmless—revolted against this treatment. Why was his father so grossly unjust, so brutally unkind? What harm had he done? If he ventured to ask the King wherein he had offended, he was cut short with mocking sneers as to his clever assumption of ignorance. No opportunity was afforded him—Ambivius took good care of that—of a quiet explanation, or of probing to the bottom the charges which he supposed must have been made against him.

Prince Innocens saw this state of things and

suspected how it arose ; but, having no ostensible ground to urge for his suspicions, he thought that it would be calumnious, or at least uncharitable, on his part to give expression to them. Besides this, Ambivius was now so constantly closeted with the King, was so completely the chosen sharer of his amusements and of his leisure, that Innocens found it more and more difficult to get opportunities for confidential intercourse with his father.

There was a dark reason why Doress did not himself seek more of the society of his youngest and favourite son. Ambivius had succeeded in instilling into the mind of Doress a suspicion that *both* of his sons by Queen Leila, however much they might conceal their feelings, yet cherished against him a veiled indignation for the execution of their mother, and nourished a secret design of avenging it upon the other members of the King's family. Now, when Leila had been so cruelly done to death, Innocens had been very young, and immense pains had been taken to keep him in ignorance of the facts. He had simply been told that, while he and his brother were absent, their mother had died ; and the King had threatened to torture and execute any one who revealed to him the real state of the case. But it had been impossible to prevent the knowledge from ultimately reaching him ; for Hilaris, who had been aware of it from the first, told his brother how things stood. Now Hilaris, chiefly through being goaded on by Ambivius at passionate moments, had sometimes spoken with indignation of his mother's execution, and

had threatened to inflict vengeance some day upon those by whom she had been brought to the scaffold. All this had been reported to the King with added particulars. It was the one point upon which his wounded conscience was most sore, and on such a subject it was impossible that he could ever talk with the boy whose mother he had doomed so unjustly to the sword.

And now all the worst demons who from early days had established a lien on the character of the magnificent King tightened their clutch upon his hair. His career was ripe for fresh catastrophes, caused partly by the lack of manly firmness in Hilaris, but mostly by the King's own evil passions, the guilty memories of his past, and the diabolical machinations of his eldest son.

For to Prince Hilaris life became quite intolerable. He was ready for almost anything. Death itself would be a deliverance from the crushing weight of his father's rage and injustice. On one occasion he had even been ordered into chains, and had only been reprieved at the hypocritical intercession of Ambivius. Existence became a burden and a weariness to the unhappy young man.

He had returned to his quarter of the palace after one of the stormy interviews which were now of constant occurrence between him and the King. His father had raved at him, had overwhelmed him with reproaches, had covered him with shameful vituperation, and that in the presence of others. Goaded by the sense of immeasurable wrong, Hilaris had fired up,

had answered his father back, had spoken of his unjust tyranny ; at last, to the horror of the attendant guards, had been so transported by passion as to exclaim :

‘Do you want to murder me, as you murdered my——’

Before he had uttered the word ‘mother,’ the King strode upon him with eyes of flame and felled him to the earth with one blow of his mighty right hand.

A dead silence fell on all. Hilaris rose, and with bent head and bleeding face, shamed beyond expression, was led out of the hall by his weeping wife. He went to his rooms, and there Ambivius immediately visited him, to all appearances overwhelmed with grief, but in reality laughing and triumphant in his black heart, assured that his day of triumph was now very near at hand.

Hilaris, his cheek bruised and swollen, was too much depressed to speak. Ambivius took his hand, fondled it, and murmured condoling words and titles of endearment, till at last the sorrow burst in a flood from the overburdened heart of Hilaris, and he wept on his brother’s neck.

‘What can I do for you ? ’ said Ambivius ; ‘ I would do *anything*. I have again and again interceded with the King for you, even to my own peril.’

‘ I know that you are good and true,’ said Hilaris.

‘ I wish, oh how I wish, that you had some one to protect you. But who is more powerful than King Doress ? No one, I suppose, unless it be the Emperor of Dumi ? ’

The words, and their probable effect, had been most accurately calculated. Hilaris seemed struck by them. That night the angry King was put on the same trail. Vast as was his own power, it was overshadowed by that of the Emperor of Dumi, the grandest potentate in the Purple Island. If there was one thing which Doress resented more than another, it was any attempt to invoke the action of the Emperor in the kingdom of Elkuds. The least step in that direction he regarded as the worst form of high treason. He had felt a momentary remorse to think that he had smitten his own heir apparent to the ground in the presence of his courtiers, but now his feelings were still more madly exacerbated, when Philip, prompted by Ambivius, ventured to say to him, 'I hope, sir, that Prince Hilaris will not ask protection from the Emperor of Dumi.' Maddened by such a suggestion, Doress threatened then and there to have Hilaris seized and thrown into a dungeon. But this would not have suited the plans of Ambivius. He wanted the youth's death, not his incarceration; and he interceded so passionately for him that he persuaded the King to have patience. Ambivius promised to watch over his interests with all tenderness, and to see that he received no harm from the plots of Hilaris.

The next step was to induce Hilaris *really* to write to the Emperor of Dumi; and this, in the sore state of the young man's mind—cruelly insulted as he felt himself to be—was not difficult. Ambivius had already planted the germ of the suggestion. He now persuaded

the page of Hilaris to condole with his master, to express indignation at the conduct of King Doress, and to persuade him to write a line entreating the Emperor to protect him from further outrage.

But Hilaris did not venture to go so far. He knew the Emperor, and knew that he was not uninterested in his welfare; for, during his early boyhood, Hilaris had spent several years at the court of Dumi, that he might receive the best education, and obtain some insight into the principles of law and government. He thought, therefore, that he might secretly venture—not by any means to invoke the Emperor's protection—but, since he was wholly innocent of wrongdoing, to write and ask if he would intercede for him, and persuade his father not to misjudge him, nor to treat him with such galling cruelty.

The letter was written; Ambivius knew that it was going to be written, and his object was to gain possession of it. The page promised that he should see it; but his treachery did not go so far, even under the secret hints of his corrupter, as to forge another in its place. Ambivius therefore opened an intrigue with a girl, the daughter of the slave messenger who would, he knew, be entrusted with any letter which might be sent. As this slave was incorruptible by bribes, Ambivius promised an immense reward to the young girl if she would get possession of the letter for a single hour, and bring it to him. This was the more easy since his spies had ascertained the day on which the messenger was to start for Dumi. The bad Prince

waited in disguise to receive from the girl the fateful letter, and, on receiving it, rushed to his rooms, cut the silken band, opened the seal. But the letter was not strong and incriminating enough for his purpose. Skilled in the arts of forgery he erased a few phrases, and substituted others far stronger and more stinging. He also dexterously altered the humble request for the Emperor's *intercession* into an urgent request for his armed *intervention*, and so made the letter treasonable in the highest degree. It was this letter, with its forged interpolations, which he handed back to the slave girl, receiving from her at the same time the news that it was to be sent the next day sewed up in the messenger's robe.

No time was to be lost. Ambivius asked the King whether it would not be desirable to have the roads watched, so that any messenger to the Emperor might be arrested. The suggestion fell in with the King's suspicions. The slave of Hilaris was arrested early the next morning and brought before the King and some of his assessors. A letter was found on him, but it was a harmless request, not to the Emperor, but to one of his sons, that he would purchase for Hilaris a few of the finely wrought jewels of Dumi's capital to be given as a present to his young wife.

'That cannot be all,' said Doress. 'Slave, you shall be stretched on the rack if you do not confess you are the bearer of other missives.'

At this point Ambivius whispered something into the ear of Philip, who said, 'Before the slave is

tortured, sire, permit me for one moment to deal with him.'

Leave was granted.

'Hold up both your arms in the air,' said Philip to the slave, 'and remain standing so.'

The slave did as he was ordered, and Philip felt his outer garment. There was nothing there; but when he proceeded to examine the inner tunic he noticed that one of the folds was almost imperceptibly thicker than the other.

'Give me a knife,' he exclaimed.

A courtier handed him one. He ripped open the seam of the tunic, and there the letter was found concealed.

It was read aloud in the form into which Ambivius had forged it, and was heard with a shudder of horror.

'Take that slave and execute him,' said the King to his headsman. 'The Prince shall be tried before our chief judge to-morrow.'

IX

L'hypocrisie est un hommage que le vice rend à la vertu.—LA ROCHEFOUCAULT.

THE trial was held with all solemnity. The whole court of judges was summoned to sit in judgment on Prince Hilaris, who was brought before them in chains, in the garments of woe, and in the deepest dejection. The case was so serious, the guilt so apparent, the terror

inspired by the King's wrath so abject, that no one dared openly to sympathise with him except his brother, Prince Innocens. The boy stood beside him in mourning habiliments, with his flowing curls cut short and his eyes bathed in tears. But every one saw that Hilaris was hopelessly doomed, when the King himself, hurried by rage into total loss of dignity, stood up as the accuser of his own son. He poured upon him such a torrent of invective that Hilaris, conscious of no crime, and believing that he had once possessed his father's love, raised for a moment his downcast eyes, aghast at such a revelation of unsuspected hatred. The incriminating letter was read; the evidence of various spies as to things which Hilaris had incautiously said was given; there seemed to be nothing left but to pronounce sentence. Then Ambivius arose, and, with consummate acting and unctuous hypocrisy, spoke for Hilaris. 'I assume,' he said, 'that the letter is genuine. Of that there can, I suppose, be no doubt, since it was found concealed in the tunic of a confidential slave. But Prince Hilaris is young. The letter, it is true, involves the guilt of high treason; but certainly my brother has meant much less than he said. His main fault has only been one of hasty imprudence. May he not, guilty though he be——'

At this point Prince Innocens fixed the full gaze of his blue eyes upon Ambivius. The effect was astonishing. The plotter could not meet the light of those pure eyes. His artificial graces collapsed; his flowing rhetoric ended in a stammer; his falsetto pathos became

unavailing. He hesitated, lost the thread of his oration, his face grew dark with every bad passion ;—he sat down. It was a sudden, strange, and ignominious collapse. All rejoiced in secret over his utter discomfiture ; none more so than the fiends whose agent he had long been, for they were secure of him, and now their work was done.

Then a strange thing happened. To all outward appearance Ambivius had seemed to be the most popular personage in the whole palace. Every one said he was, and therefore every one assumed it to be so. But the disguises of hypocrisy have an awkward way of slipping off, and once or twice the demons, out of sheer mischief, had pulled the strings of their votary's mask from behind, and had revealed the real features of Ambivius, just when it was most inopportune for him that they should be seen. It was impossible for him always to coin his lips into smiles, and to wear the look of radiant and simple-hearted amiability. His nominal friends had not unfrequently surprised an expression on his features which seemed to underlie the one which he intended. Besides this it had been indispensable that he should discover himself to some few of his spies and agents in his true guise. In some strange way hatred and suspicion of this popular prince were everywhere in the air. And when he sullenly resumed his seat, though no one knew all the facts of his black treachery, yet to their own general amazement almost every one joined in a low unmistakable hiss. There was an indefinable unuttered expression of

aversion the moment that he was cut short in his unctuous envenomed pleading, and hastily stopped, overwhelmed with confusion.

The King's own mind was too much blinded by jealous passions to enable him even to notice, much less to understand, the significance of the occurrence. He said to Hilaris in an ominous voice, 'Traitor, what have you to say in defence of your treason?'

'Sire,' said Hilaris in a quiet tone, and with unwonted dignity of manner, 'in one sense I am guilty, if you so regard it. I *did* write a letter to the Emperor of Dumi, who was kind to me when I was a boy, and I did ask him to intercede for me. I did *not* write the letter which has been read in court. It has been altered by forgery.'

'A likely story!' said the King. 'Is this your seal?'

'Yes.'

'And the silken band you use?'

'Yes.'

'And was the slave whom I have ordered to the block your confidential messenger?'

'Yes.'

'And is this letter in your handwriting?'

'I wrote most of it; but some words have been altered by forgery.'

The defence, however, seemed desperately improbable. Hilaris admitted that, with his own hand, he had given the letter to the slave the night before he started. No interpolation could be detected, for Ambivius had

done his work with accomplished skill. Who could have stolen the letter? In whose interest could it have been altered? One person, and one *only*, suspected the real state of the case—Prince Innocens. But he dared not utter a suspicion for which he had no shadow of evidence—only he once more fixed his gaze on Ambivius, and once more Ambivius confirmed his misgivings by visibly shrinking, and growing pale beneath his glance.

The judges gave their sentence. Prince Hilaris was doomed to die that evening, as a convicted traitor, by the sword of the executioner.

No sooner was the court broken up than Innocens sought his father. He still wore the dress of a suppliant; he had even sprinkled ashes over his fair hair. When he entered the presence-chamber Ambivius was with the King, explaining that he had only broken down from extreme emotion! The King was praising his generosity to his brother. Innocens quietly said that he wished to speak to the King alone, and requested Ambivius to retire. Then the princely boy prostrated himself at his father's feet, and clasped them, and bathed them with his tears, and implored pardon, or at least a reprieve, for Hilaris.

‘He has sinned too deeply for pardon,’ answered Doress sullenly. ‘Princes who indulge in high treason must die the death.’

‘Father,’ said the boy, ‘what Hilaris said in court was the simple truth. I cannot prove it; but I am as convinced of it as I am of my own existence, for I can

read his thoughts as clearly as if they were written in a book.'

'Your goodness blinds you to the guilt of others, my poor boy,' said the King. 'The defence of Hilaris was absurd and impossible on the face of it. What he was forced to admit was itself criminal; and who could have got hold of his letter, or would have dared to put forged interpolations into his confessed message?'

The King put his hands on his son's shoulder, and gazed into his eyes as though he would read his inmost soul. Innocens fearlessly and guilelessly met that searching gaze. And then, somehow, without a word being uttered, Doress read in the unspoken thoughts of Innocens, '*Ambivius is guilty. Ambivius is the forger!*' With a start of surprise he became conscious of the boy's conviction; with yet deeper surprise it flashed upon him that perhaps the boy was right. Yet how could such a thing be? Was not Ambivius the trusted friend, the constant defender of Hilaris?

All that Doress said was, 'Impossible, my son, impossible.'

'And must Hilaris die?'

'All the judges have found him guilty. He must die.'

'O father, father! Will you not even listen to my intercession?'

'I have already refused the intercession of your elder brother, Ambivius,' said the King; and again, though Innocens spoke no word, yet as Doress looked into his eyes he read the thought, *The intercession of Ambivius was a guilty sham!*

But Doress would not admit the suspicion. He turned away and said, 'You plead in vain: Hilaris must die.'

Innocens burst into a storm of sobs and tears, and with a breaking heart went to the prison of Hilaris. Strange to say he found him cheerful, almost happy, and altogether fearless. He had spoken his last farewells to his wife. Life under its present conditions had no charm for him. He was ready to die.

The young Prince had scarcely entered when Ambivius, with cruel and deadly falsity, came in to see him for the last time. Hilaris would have received him, but Innocens rose, and with a gesture of command, and an accent more passionately stern than Hilaris had ever heard him utter, ordered him not to enter. To the astonishment of Hilaris, the eldest son of Doress obeyed the boy, and went sheepishly out.

'What means this?' asked Hilaris.

'We need not talk of it now, my brother,' answered Innocens; 'but *that man* is the forger, *that man* is your betrayer!'

'Oh, the accursed, the unutterable hypocrite!' groaned Hilaris, detecting as in one flash of insight the subterranean Erebus of plots into which he had been entrapped.

'Think not of him now, dear brother,' said Innocens. 'Be sure that ere long his sin will find him out.'

Innocens sat down by Hilaris on the stone bench by the dungeon wall, and took his chained hand. He told him of his suspicions, he told him of his fruitless



INNOCENS SAT DOWN BY HIM AND TOOK HIS CHAINED HAND

intercession with the King, and he said that he would stay with him until the fatal hour arrived. Then there blossomed up between them the sweet flowers of happy childish memories of years while yet their mother lived, and of the days when they were happy boys together at the court of the Emperor. And they hoped for the time when, haply, they should meet again with their beautiful injured mother in a better home. And together they knelt down and lifted their hearts to Elyon and his son Imrah who had lived and died to save the sinful and sorrowing denizens of the Purple Island.

And while they were talking, hand in hand, hardly conscious how the time passed, the summons of the executioner was heard at the dungeon door, and in his black mask the man stood there in silence, leaning on his massive sword.

‘Farewell, dear brother,’ said Hilaris. ‘My life of late has been none so sweet that I should greatly desire to prolong it; nor, faulty as I have been—very very faulty and foolish—have I lived so bad a life that I should fear the swift stroke of death. Elyon will forgive my faults; Imrah will wash them white.’

‘I will walk with you to the place of doom, my brother,’ said Innocens, weeping on his neck.

Hilaris entreated him to spare himself the terrible spectacle; but Innocens would not suffer his brother to die alone. He walked with him, hand in hand, to the block. Then, murmuring his last almost inaudible words of prayer, and hope, and courage, and

farewell, he withdrew a few paces, knelt down, and hid his face in his hands. A moment after he heard the awful stroke, the dull thud, the plash of rushing blood which told him that Hilaris was dead.

He sank senseless on the stone floor, and was carried to his room.

X

‘TRIUMPH! triumph!’ shouted Hara as he entered the shrine of King Ashmod, and saluted the demon-chief. ‘Did I not say that I would make a splendid devastation, an anticipated hell of the most gorgeous palace, and a wreck and ruin of the most magnificent king in the Purple Island?’

‘You have done fairly well,’ said Ashmod.

‘*Fairly* well?’ repeated Hara sullenly. ‘Doress has slain his wife, he has slain his son; what more would Ashmod have?’

‘There is yet Prince Innocens,’ said Ashmod. ‘Complete your work!’

‘I hate, hate, hate Ashmod,’ said Hara as he left the presence.

‘So do we,’ snarled a whole chorus of fiends.

‘He neither praises nor rewards me, though I have done all the work.’

‘*You?*’ said Jealousy. ‘It was *I* that did it all.’

‘And *I*,’ said Hatred. ‘You only looked on, Hara.’

‘And *I* more than all three,’ said Suspicion.

‘ Silence, you curs of Gehenna ! ’ said Hara, lashing at them madly with an iron scourge, till they fled and howled at him, gnashing their teeth. ‘ You may be masters of those fools of Porphyrians, but you are slaves to me, and if you dare to disobey me I will fling you into boiling pitch ! ’

And the horrid rafters rang with shrieks and wailing, and yells and howls.

XI

Per quae peccat quis, per haec et torquetur.

KING DORESS could not shake off the impression of unspoken misgiving which he had read in the eyes of Innocens. He once more fell into the mood of indescribable anguish from which he had suffered after the doom of Leila. His affections were naturally strong, though they could be swept away as by a deluge before the demons of Jealousy, Anger, and Suspicion, to whom he had given up the possession of his soul. He became once more a terribly haunted man. That very night Queen Leila, in her white blood-besprinkled robe, stood by his bed and said to him, ‘ Most miserable of all kings, murderer of thy wife, murderer of thy son. Repent ! beware ! thine end is nigh ! ’ He awoke with a shriek of terror, and slept no more.

Ambivius had been more disturbed than he had

dared to confess by the way in which his conscious guilt had been cowed before the pure insight of his young brother. He needed change to rally his scattered forces, and to mature the unfulfilled designs which should at last gratify his burning ambition. And the fiends to whom he had sold his soul saw that now the time had come to hurl him over the last precipice of crime and ruin.

He went to the King, whose obvious coldness showed him that his suspicions had been awakened, and, saying that his feelings were harrowed by recent events, asked leave to travel through the dominions of his Majesty for a year, and to visit his principal cities.

Doress gave him leave, and, for the first time, felt secretly glad to get rid of him and to be left alone with his pure and beloved Innocens.

Ambivius started on his journey; but nothing was farther from his intentions than to withdraw his hand from the wheel-work of intrigue, which he had already set in motion. Philip with his wife Rhoda were now bound to him, hand and foot, by personal complicity with his plots. Indeed he had established over Rhoda a sort of ascendancy which compelled her to be obedient to his bidding. Before he started on his journey he had agreed upon a secret cypher in which he could correspond with them.

After a few weeks he wrote a letter to Philip in this cypher, in which, finally throwing off the mask, 'The King,' he said, 'is now old, and wretched, and

useless. To what purpose is it that he should linger on, a mass of mental and bodily disease? It is in the nature of things that he should seem to have died of illness, even if his death be a little hastened. If he dies, of course I shall succeed to his dominions. Innocens is out of the question; he is too young to rule, and lacks the necessary gifts; I will look after *him*. To prevent any accident I have a forged will ready if necessary, but I also have an understanding with some of the captains of the bodyguard, and, in case of the King's death, I shall be ready to seize the vacant throne. If I should chance to send you—well, I will call it a powerful medicine, or a love potion, or a powder of succession—will you and Rhoda make use of it for the necessary purpose? If you will, I will immediately give you fifty talents of gold, and I further pledge myself by oath to confer upon you the rule of an independent principality.'

Philip and Rhoda had been already too deeply immersed in crime to make it easy for them to recede. If Ambivius fell, was it not inevitable that they should fall with him? Could he not bring down the axe upon both their necks? Besides, he offered a splendid bait to their ambition and their greed. To enjoy all that gold, and to wear the crowns of independent princes—would it not be grand?

Philip wrote back that he was at the disposal of Ambivius. The huge bribe was handed over to him under the guise of a great architectural design. The poison was conveyed to him by an unsuspecting slave

who believed himself to be carrying a vial of fragrant and healing oil.

But there are many stumbling-blocks in the path of crime—stumbling-blocks colossal and unforeseen. Philip was not a born criminal; he had only succumbed to the fascinations and temptations of a stronger and more resolute villain. Rhoda too had terrible twinges of conscience. They could not make up their minds to use the poison. They often consulted about the advisability of revealing the whole plot and flinging themselves on the King's mercy; and all the more because—since the execution of Prince Hilaris—every one had begun to avow the most undisguised detestation of the absent Ambivius.

Agitated by fear and remorse, Philip fell into a burning fever. He became so seriously ill that his recovery was declared to be impossible. No sooner had he heard his doom than he sent for his wife, and bade her instantly to fling away the poison.

That afternoon the dying man was surprised and touched by a visit from the great King himself. The visit was one of simple kindness. Doress was attached to his sister Pacifica, and had always liked her eldest son, Philip. He spoke to him with the greatest affection, and gave orders to his own physician to attend him, and treat him with the utmost care.

Philip burst into tears, and, rallying all the little strength which he had left, he wrote with feeble hand a confession of his crimes, to be handed to the King as soon as he was dead. He died that night. The

King read his confession with horror. Rhoda and several of her slaves were arrested and kept in custody. A swift messenger was sent to summon Ambivius home. But everything was done in the profoundest secrecy, and the roads were guarded to prevent him from receiving any intelligence. He came back knowing nothing, and suspecting nothing, until he entered the city. Then, indeed, it seemed to him a direful omen that no one met him; all shunned him; none returned his greetings. But it was too late to escape. Summoning all his impudence he entered his father's presence with a gay smile, and advanced to offer him a warm embrace.

‘Parricide!’ thundered the King. ‘Would you murder your father, and yet embrace him?’

At those words the edifice of all the young man's ambitions was shattered as by a lightning stroke.

‘Guards, put him in chains! Take him to prison!’

Next day he was tried. The confession of Philip was read aloud. The slave who had carried the vial was produced. Rhoda was led into court, and the King promised her complete pardon if she would reveal the simple truth. She did so. She ratified all the evidence which had been adduced.

Ambivius rose, and defended himself with eloquent skill and pathos. He appealed to his father. Had he not always been a faithful and obedient son? Had he not to his own detriment constantly interceded for his brother Hilaris? Had he not tried to protect the King from a thousand perils? Had he not even watched

over his nightly slumbers? Who could believe the tissue of perjuries now urged against him? Could he not have murdered the King, unsuspected, a hundred times if he had so desired? Philip had accused him falsely, because he was jealous of Rhoda's regard for him. Let the King's wisdom sweep away these lies, and let him take back to his affection the most faithful of his sons. As for the vial, he had not the least wish to deny that he had sent the vial, but it contained a mere harmless medicine.

This he said, believing that its contents had been destroyed. The King turned to Rhoda, who was in a state of the bitterest indignation against Ambivius for his insinuations against her.

'When I flung away the rest of the poison,' she said, 'I reserved a little, meaning to destroy myself. I concealed it on my own person. Here is the vial which Ambivius sent, and it is not yet empty.'

'A malefactor was yesterday doomed to death,' said the King. 'Let it be tried on him!'

The wretch was led into the court, and bidden to swallow the potion. He did so, fell on the floor in convulsions, and in one minute was dead.

A hush of horror fell over the assemblage.

'Now what have you to say, paricide and monster?' exclaimed the King in a voice of doom.

'It is the foul invention of yon woman,' said Ambivius, turning upon Rhoda a look of fearful hatred.

'Nay, wretch,' she said, 'destroyer of my happiness,

murderer of my husband, ruiner of my peace, you escape not so ! Oh, King, read this letter ! It is in a secret cypher ; here is the key to the cypher.'

Ambivius saw that all was over.

'It is enough,' he said sullenly ; 'that woman has destroyed me : I am guilty.'

It was impossible to repress the roar of execration which arose when he had uttered these words. Sentence of death was solemnly pronounced upon him. When it was uttered he glared round him with hatred and defiance on his face, but he could not see a single pitying glance, unless it was on the beautiful face of Prince Innocens.

When he left the court King Doress the Magnificent was overpowered with all that he had gone through. He felt crushed by the accumulated horrors of his life. He became seriously ill, and raved incessantly. How utterly had he been ruined by the demons to whom he had listened ! Nothing seemed to calm him but the presence of Prince Innocens, though in these days the boy seemed to have lost all the natural sprightliness of his character and was full of sadness, drooping like a flower which has been drenched by storm.

While the monarch was in this state he gave no further order for the execution of Ambivius, and, indeed, he incessantly cursed his hard fate that it should fall to him to doom to death those who should have been dearest to him, and who had derived their being from himself. But in one of his lucid intervals, when he was sane indeed, yet full of wrath against the world,

he was told that the gaoler of Ambivius wished to see him. The man was admitted, and said that his prisoner, hearing how ill the King was, had offered him enormous bribes to strike off his chains and set him free, threatening that the moment he was free he would be king and would slay his father, and inflict condign vengeance on all his family.

Then, in a voice which astonished the hearers by its force and compass, Doress shouted out :

‘Then execute the parricide this very hour!’

Thus did the bad career of Ambivius, and all the schemes into which the fiends had lured him, and all the gigantic hopes with which they had tempted him, perish, consume; and come to a fearful end. His frustrated ambition was hurled to the earth like some torch left there to smoulder and to go out in darkness and foul stench.

And as he was being led to execution in his felon’s dress, his hands manacled together, he could not help feeling, amid thoughts as black as midnight, how far different it might have been with him! The laughter of the mocking demons whose false lights had led him to ruin seemed to be ringing in his ears. Those rosy gleams and golden meteors which lured him on the path of crime had but flickered over the quagmires of hopeless death. He had been tempted to his evil career by the demons of guilty ambition. Those demons had robbed him even of the earthly blessings and dignities which would naturally have fallen to his lot, and had now whirled him down a prey to grinning infamy.

He had been by birth a prince ; many had courted and flattered him, and professed to be his friends. Had they all turned from him ? Had he changed into aversion and hatred the feelings of *all* ? Was there no pitying heart—was there no eye which for him could be dimmed with tears ? Oh, what a ghastly unutterable failure he felt himself to be, and how hard and thorny was the road which he had made for his own miserable and guilty feet ! To have his head struck off by the common executioner—to be slain amid the curses of those whom he had sacrificed for his own vile and selfish aims—was that the reward of such misdoings ? Oh, was there not one, not one of all the thousands whom he had known, to pity him ?

With these maddening thoughts in his heart, with bent head, remorseful yet impenitent, the bad Prince walked from his prison through the gilded corridors which led to the court in which he was to lay his head upon the block. But while those words, ‘Not one, not one to pity me,’ were sounding through his thoughts like a knell of doom, a door opened from a chamber beside the corridor, and Prince Innocens stood before him. Ambivius lifted his eyes in a glance of frightened misery, which passed at once into angry defiance. Had the boy come to insult him ? to triumph over him ? At least he should see no sign of weakness.

No ! Prince Innocens had come for a very different purpose. He had never liked Ambivius, he had always shrunk from him with a sort of involuntary shudder. With inward horror he had seen through his painted

mask of hypocrisy, and had fathomed his sinister designs. But now pity triumphed over indignation and abhorrence—for Ambivius was still young, and after a life so guilty and so wasted Ambivius was doomed to die.

Innocens gazed sadly for a moment on the mournful procession ; then, almost timidly, he stepped forward, grasped the fettered hand of the Prince, and said in a sad voice :

‘ My brother, I am very very sorry for you.’

They were simple words, but they smote on the soul of Ambivius as the sunbeam smites on the snow and causes it to rush down in avalanche. With an impulse of despair and affection which he could not control he lifted his chained hands, and tried to press the face of Innocens to his own. They mingled their tears together, and Ambivius gasped forth, ‘ Oh, Innocens, Innocens ! would that I had been like you ! But I am black of soul, and my life has been a very leprosy of guilt. Lost ! lost ! No hope ! No hope ! ’

His arms fell from off his brother’s shoulder, and the fetters gave a dismal clank.

‘ Ambivius,’ said Innocens, ‘ Elyon can hear the cry of penitence even in the flash of doom.’

A moment after, the sword swept down, and the thread of that evil life was shorn away.

A few days afterwards Doress also died, an object of pity even to his worst foes.

Terrible indeed had been the triumph of Ashmod and Hara and their inferior fiends. This king—so

princely, so victorious, so magnificent, so successful, so madly envied—this king, the builder of glorious cities, whose name was received with acclamations by many peoples—this king, who had lavished his wealth with such superb and ungrudging munificence—this king, whose palace was one of the wonders of the world—after turning that palace into shambles which rang with shrieks; after dooming to the scaffold his two sons, and the wife whom he had loved—this king, haunted by ghosts, tormented by demons, so shaken by madness as to be a terror to himself, so prostrated by disease as to be an object of pity to his attendants—this king, so gifted with unequalled endowments, and not devoid of strong natural affections—this king, who, had he but acquired himself, and subdued his evil passions, and obeyed the laws of Elyon, might have ranked amongst the greatest of mankind—vanished into the night. ‘Call me not Doress the Magnificent,’ he said to Innocens, his sole surviving son, the only consoler of his last dark hours; ‘call me Magor Missabib—terror on every side.’

Oh, deeper dole,
That so august a spirit, shrined so fair,
Should from the starry sessions of his peers
Decline to quench so bright a brilliancy
In Hell’s sick spume! Ah me! the deeper dole!

The great lords of the kingdom came to tell Innocens officially that Doress was dead, and that he—the beloved of all—the heir alike of the ancient and of

the newer line—was unquestioned King of Elkuds, and would be welcomed by all the people.

He sighed deeply. ‘Oh, keep me innocent,’ he murmured to himself; ‘make others great!’ ‘Advise me!’ he said to his father’s wisest and most aged counsellors.

‘Your Majesty cannot refuse the responsibility,’ said the senators. ‘There is no king possible but you.’

They left him, and he cried, ‘O Hatob, friend of my life, tell me, must this be?’

In a moment Hatob stood beside him, laid his hand upon his head, and said, ‘Thou art called to this work, my son; accept it, and fear not. Elyon, who loves thee, will still be with thee. Did not Imrah say, “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you”?’

When the great lords came to him an hour afterwards to receive his instructions, they found him still upon his knees.

So Innocens was master of all the accumulated wealth, was king of all the vast dominions! He had not sought the splendid burden; he had not dreamed of it; he would fain have avoided it. It came to him in the line of duty, and he could not shun the duty which his destiny had imposed upon him. He sought the most upright and disinterested advisers; he became, of all the kings of his day, the wisest and the best beloved. And ‘in that humane great monarch’s golden look,’ peace flourished out of the earth, and the people rejoiced with a great joy.

Which won? Ambivius or Innocens?

Which won? The plotter, the self-seeker, the wily



THEY FOUND HIM STILL UPON HIS KNEES

astute deceiver, the corrupter of purity, the servant of the demons; or the blameless and harmless, who

desired only to spend his whole life, however meekly, in whatever deep obscurity, obedient to the laws of Heaven?

Which enjoyed? King Doress the Magnificent, or King Innocens the humble and the undefiled?

Which enjoyed? The sumptuous magnificent sovereign, who made his palace a miracle of gorgeousness, but left his heart to be a home of the demons, and the haunt of unclean things; or the youth who had long reduced all his prayers to this one :

‘ Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God. Let Thy loving Spirit lead me into the way of righteousness ’ ?

XII

E quel d' inferno

Gridava : O tu dal ciel, perchè mi privi ?

Tu te ne porti di costui l' eterno

Per una lagrimetta che 'l mi toglie.

DANTE, *Purgat.* v. 104.

In the dark barge ; over the more than midnight sea. King Doress was seated there. He wore no diadem ; he was clad in no purple robes ; no jewels blazed upon his hands. He was wholly undistinguishable from the humblest pauper in his realm, who sat not far from him.

In awful silence, through the darkness which might be felt, making no ripple on the black sea, the dark

barge glided on, and on the horizon Doress saw scarcely the glimmer of a light.

The prow touched the shore, and through a misty twilight two faintly shining figures came to meet him. He shuddered ; he drew back ; he would fain have fled. For in one of those white spectres he recognised the features of his wife, Queen Leila, and in the other of his son, Prince Hilaris.

‘ Oh ! ’ he groaned aloud, ‘ and is there to be no peace, no forgiveness even here ? Have you come to hale me into the nether flames, that I may be beaten and crushed by demons for ever ? ’

‘ Nay,’ said the Queen in a low, sweet, mournful voice. ‘ We were bidden to await you, and to take you where we are. Fear not. We are not worthy to be admitted into Elyon’s presence yet. This is a timeless world ; but when long aeons have passed, as men count time, in some great change hereafter, when our souls have fully learnt even by means of evil that good is best ; when they are truly and perfectly penitent ; when every film is cleared from our eyes ; when the stains left upon our souls by the Evil One are purged away—then it may be——’

She did not end her sentence.

‘ But oh ! ’ he cried, ‘ have you forgiven me all my jealous passion, all my cruel tyranny ? Have you, whom I loved so wildly, and has my poor son, forgiven the terrible end to which I doomed you both ? ’

There was a wan smile on the lips of Hilaris. ‘ Father,’ he said, ‘ we have more than forgiven you.

In this land there are, there can be no resentments. And what *is* a terrible end? Death is but death, whether it come in a sword's flash, or down the long declivities of disease. Come with us! We live as yet but in the twilight; but often a face of love looks down upon us, and there is one soft bright star above us, which shines for evermore.'

A little afterwards, from under the dark covering which had shrouded him from recognition as he lay upon the barge, the miserable Ambivius crept in horror to the land. Two dark figures met him, and I saw him shrink with terror as they grasped him by either hand; but what befell him I know not, unless truth and the love of good were made visible to him, and accepted by him in the very stroke of doom.

THE BASILISK AND THE LEOPARD;

OR, THE STORY OF FLORIAN AND ARDENS

I

The deadliest snakes are those which, twined 'mongst flowers,
Blend their bright colouring with varied blossoms,
Their fierce eyes glittering like the spangled dewdrop ;
In all so like what Nature has most harmless,
That sportive innocence, which dreads no danger,
Is poisoned unawares.—SIR W. SCOTT.

O thou goddess,
Thou divine nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
In these two princely boys.—SHAKESPEARE, *Cymbeline*.

A PORPHYRIAN ruler—the great Duke Altus—tall, stately, and of middle age—was walking in the beautiful gardens of his castle with his two sons, Florian and Ardens. Some of the high-born Porphyrians, both fathers and mothers, were singularly neglectful of their children. The fathers were frequently absorbed in the urgent business of the state, or in the management of their broad domains ; the mothers in the eager round of social pleasure and splendid entertainments. The consequence was that in many instances the young Porphyrians of the higher classes ‘tumbled up’ rather than were educated. They suffered more complete

moral and spiritual neglect than the majority of those of humble birth, who, even if they were neglected by their parents, were strenuously taken in hand by their religious teachers. The young aristocrats were in great measure left to the care of servants, and when they grew too old for their nurseries were sent—often without the smallest discrimination of their character or fitness—to large public schools. There they were educated in a casual way, in traditional forms of learning ; but, in the days of which I speak, were only exceptionally and accidentally trained to

Make their moral being their prime care.

The noble Altus had been more careful in the supervision of his two motherless boys than were many of his fellow nobles. He had not wholly neglected them. To the best of his ability he had used such opportunities as he could find to inculcate into their minds right principles, and to set high ideals before them. But his opportunities were rare and his skill but moderate. Much of the good which he tried to do was undone by the carelessness or unfaithfulness of others. Still, up to this time, Florian and Ardens were innocent boys—white vellum, not as yet blurred and scrawled with evil inscriptions ; virgin clay, plastic to the hands of wise or wicked potters. They were sons of whom any father might have felt proud, and were as yet

Two boys who thought there was no more behind
Than such a day to-morrow as to-day,
And to be boy eternal.

And as they were now fourteen and fifteen years old, Altus thought that he could no longer delay the dreaded hour in which he must part from them, and launch them, like frail barks upon a stormy sea, to be wafted at first by soft zephyrs over glittering waves, but fatally apt to be

Unheeding of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
Which, hushed in grim repose, expects its evening prey.

Altus was purposely taking this walk with his boys that he might talk seriously to them for the last time before they left their home. But somehow he did not feel himself able to say a tenth part of what he would have wished to say. He felt separated from them by a chasm of years; he felt it difficult to lay aside the reserve of manner and speech which, like a thin veil of ice, seemed ever to be freezing afresh between him and them. His exhortations, though they were entirely sincere, sounded even to himself like cold and formal platitudes. The light gay nature of Florian constantly interrupted him with trifling remarks, whereas Ardens was far more interested in hearing him talk about current events than about serious duties. Much as he loved his boys, he felt that it was not in his power to admonish and forewarn them as earnestly as he desired. Altus was a man of honour and integrity, but he was hardly in any deep sense one of the devoted servants of Elyon his king. Yet he was so sincerely desirous to do his best, that, before they re-entered their stately home, he said, 'My boys, you are about to leave me,

and it is very necessary that you should receive some earnest instruction. There is still a week before you go to school. Our friend Alciphron is wise and good ; he has had much experience in the training of boys. I shall take you both to him on the day before you start, and I trust that you will listen to the advice he will give you.'

I have not yet said what the boys were like. Though they were brothers they did not at all resemble each other. Ardens, the elder, had a noble face ; his eyes were of bright hazel, his mouth resolute, his hair a mass of contumacious curls ; he resembled his father. Florian recalled the features of his mother to those who had known her. He was very beautiful, but any one who looked at him would have seen that his danger would lie in weakness and effeminacy. His complexion was bright, his eyes large and liquid, his mouth irresolute, his soft hair had a gleam of gold. He was so beautiful that one of the greatest of the Porphyrian artists who was painting a picture of 'Happy Boyhood' begged Altus that he might be allowed to take a likeness of Florian as the ideal of his picture. Altus demurred lest the boy should be made vain ; but the painter, who was a man of fine character, gave his assurance that by no single word should his son be led to think of his personal appearance. This promise he faithfully kept, and his influence over Florian was excellent. Yet some mischief was done ; for, when the lovely picture was exhibited, many recognised the features of the sitter, and it was im-

possible to keep the boy quite unaware of the whispers of admiration.

On the day before the two lads went to the great school, to be flung as it were into that burning fiery furnace of temptation, which would either melt all that was gold in them, or refine it by the purging away of all that was dross, Altus took them to the house of Alciphron. The old Mage, as men called him, was a recluse; but his secluded life, so far from being spent in selfish isolation, was always at the service of his fellow men. One of his strongest wishes was, to the utmost of his power, to elevate and ennoble the coming generation. For this reason his vast experience and his invaluable gifts were at the disposal alike of the old and of the young who invoked his aid.

Before introducing the boys, Altus explained to Alciphron his object in bringing them with him. As a father, devoted to the welfare of his sons, he entreated the Mage to use his potent spells in their favour, and to give them amulets which would preserve them from harm; since

In the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.

Alciphron smiled. 'You err,' he said, 'as many err. Such powers as I possess are not mine; the force of such amulets as I can bestow is in reality at the disposal of any one as much as at my own. They are potent, but their validity depends solely on the will of those who use them.'

‘Yet they tell me you have saved many from the paths of the destroying Ashmod,’ said Altus.

‘I have only saved them as the anchor saves the boat which does not leave the haven; as the helm saves the ship whose watchful captain and crew have reefed the sails, and kept a keen look out before the bursting of the storm. Of myself I am impotent; as Elyon’s servant I can sometimes help his sons.’

‘My boys await you,’ said the Duke. ‘I will leave them with you till the afternoon. I will not *entreat* you to do all you can for them, because I know that your own goodness of heart will lead you to do so.’

‘You judge me aright,’ said Alciphron; ‘and now introduce your sons to me.’

They came in, and the old man received them with the most hearty kindness. There was nothing cold or stiff—nothing obtrusively didactic or dictatorial, in his dealing with the two lads. They saw at once that he loved them and cared for them as though they had been his children, and they were at their ease with him and trusted him. The genial sense of youth made them rely without misgiving on his transparent sincerity of goodness.

He did not at once plunge into serious topics, but awoke their interest as he questioned them about their home, their friends, their games, their studies, the books which they loved best. They, in their turn, asked him many questions about the great school to which they were going. He knew it full well, with all its potential perils and all its possible advantages, for in

earlier years he had himself been a chief teacher there.

He walked with them round his garden and showed them the almost human affection for him of the animals which he had tamed. He also told them many interesting things about the trees and flowers. Then he strolled with them into his ample picture gallery, and as they had been accustomed to the gems of art in their own home, they were delighted with many of the pictures.

‘What is the story of that picture?’ asked Florian.

He pointed to a lovely painting of a fair sleeping youth, on either side of whom there stood two female figures.

‘It is the old story of the choice of Hercules again, under another form,’ said Alciphron. ‘You see the tree which seems to divide the picture in half?’

‘It is a laurel, the tree of fame, the tree I love,’ said Ardens.

‘It is,’ said Alciphron with a smile. ‘The youth, though asleep, is sleeping in his armour, and his arm rests on his crimson shield. On one side of him, in her robe of light blue and her tunic of rose colour and her ornaments of coral, stands Pleasure—but pleasure “as regarded by a virginal imagination—the foe not so much of purity as of austerity.” She is holding out to him a sprig of myrtle. On the other side, the maiden of sterner beauty, in her dark purple mantle, is Duty. She holds in her left hand the book of the law, “This

do, and thou shalt live ; ” in her right hand the sword with which the youth must fight in its defence. Something in the face of the youth makes one feel sure that he will make the right choice. The painter was only a boy of eighteen when he painted it, and the figure is perhaps intended for himself. You, my boys, like all who ever lived, will have to make *your* choice too between duty and pleasure.’

A few minutes later the attention of both the boys was attracted by another picture. On one side of it a woman, beautiful, but with a hard and cruel face, is gazing at a youth who lies in the sottish drench of satiety, so sunk in slumber that you might almost seem to hear him snore. Young goatish satyrs are sporting with his discarded armour. One of them is blowing a sea-shell in his ear.

‘ Why is he blowing that shell ? ’ asked Florian.

‘ The sea-shell is the emblem of pleasures which are but echoes—pleasures which can please no more,’ answered the old man. ‘ The shell has been flung upon the shore. There is no purple in it now ; its murmurs tell of the ebbing tide.’

‘ What is it which is coming out of the tree ? ’ asked Florian.

‘ It is not a tree,’ said the Mage, ‘ it is only a rotten trunk, covered with dead corpse-like fungi. And what you see issuing from it is a swarm of hornets, by which the painter meant to give an emblem of pleasures which have now become stinging agonies.’

‘ Look at that coarse, ugly, vicious young satyr, who

has crept through the youth's breastplate,' said Ardens.
'What an animal!'

'Yes,' said Alciphron, 'and do you see with what infinite contempt he is thrusting out the tip of his red tongue? It is an emblem of utter defeat, like the poet's picture of the youth in the bower of Acrasia, lying beside his idle armour, and

Ne for them, ne for honour cared he,
Ne aught that did for his advancement tend;
But in lewd loves, and wastefull luxurie,
His days, his goods, his bodie he did spend.
O horrible enchantment that him so did blend!

But the painter's symbol is even more vivid than the poet's.'

'Ugh!' said Ardens, 'I don't like that picture at all. I like this one much better.'

He pointed to the figure of a youth, seated in a glow of radiance which seemed to emanate from his own godlike strength and purity, as, with a curl of scorn upon his lips, he watches the effect of the arrows he has sped against a portentous snake. On the other side of the picture, the wounded monster, in the fury of its deathful agony, is tearing down rocks and trees which it has encircled in its anguished folds.

'One wonders that the young god was not afraid of that terrific monster,' said Florian.

'It looks terrific, my Florian,' said the Mage; 'but, after all, the python is only a huge worm; and when the arrows of light pierce it, it bursts asunder in the midst from its own putrescence.'

‘But what is that gleaming thing which is wriggling out of the great pool of the serpent’s gore?’ asked Ardens.

‘Alas!’ said Alciphron, ‘it is meant to symbolise the truth that corruption never seems to be *quite* slain. It needs incessant watch, for out of the serpent’s egg springs forth the cockatrice, and its seed is a fiery flying serpent. Still that picture is a picture of victory, as the other is of defeat. But perhaps you are tired of looking at pictures now?’

‘No,’ said Ardens; ‘here is one more which I don’t understand. What is that old man doing with his bell and staff? And why does he look so earnestly at the youth opposite to him?’

‘That again,’ said the Mage, ‘is a picture of secured victory. You see that cypress wood behind the two figures? It is the dark wood of human life. The old man is a hermit, and the wild boar at his feet is meant to show that by his bell and staff—that is, by watchfulness and effort—he has subdued the impulses of his lower nature. The splendid youth opposite him, with his short crisp curls of sunny hair, has conquered in a different way—by hard fighting; he is in full armour, and has a cross on his mantle, and is leaning on his great cross-hilted sword. At his feet, with its slimy tail, spiky wings, and savage teeth, lies the dragon he has conquered—not dead, for these dragons, even when they *seem* dead, have sometimes a terrible way of springing to life again—but though not dead, yet helpless. It cannot bite through those iron

greaves, and if it but stirs, the sharp sword in the youth's hand is ready to stab it into suppression. But tell me, Ardens, do you see nothing else in the picture ?'

'There is the shining circle above, with Imrah in it, Elyon's son.'

'Yes ; it is the vision which inspired, and gave the victory, both to the youth who conquered by fighting, and the old man who prevailed by solitude and prayer. Come and refresh yourselves ; you cannot take in the meaning of any more pictures now.'

The old man led them to a pleasant alcove in the garden, where was laid a delightful meal of fruits, like that with which Adam and Eve regaled the affable Archangel in Paradise. By this time his keen insight into character enabled him exactly to understand the different temperaments of the two lads ; and when the meal was ended he sent Ardens to wander once more through the picture gallery, or in the garden, while he spoke to Florian.

'My boy,' he said, 'let me say to you a few serious words. You are going into a world of difficulty and temptation, of glamour and peril. You will find dangerous enemies ; but your worst enemy by far—the only enemy who can really hurt you—is yourself ; for without your own consent no foe can harm you, even though it may assault you. You must master, you must acquire, you must possess yourself.'

'Do I not possess even myself ?' said Florian, laughing a little pertly.

‘No, Florian, you do not. Give me your earnest attention. What do you mean when you say “I”? Do you mean your body, or your mind, or your spirit? or all three together?’

Florian was silent.

‘We must conquer ourselves; we must gain our own lives,’ said the Mage. ‘You have a higher and a lower self. Your higher self means every element in you which is good and pure and true: it is represented by your *spirit*, by that which enables you to hold intercourse with all that you feel to be divine, and to be above you. Your lower self is represented by all the desires of the mind—wrath, anger, clamour, pride, envy, hatred, malice; and by all the appetites of the flesh, when they are abused for purposes of gluttony or drunkenness, or sloth or uncleanness. There is a fiend who takes the form of a fierce leopard, and would fain master the passions of your mind; there is another fiend who takes the form of a basilisk. He will try to deceive and destroy you by the impulses of the body. My boy, beware of the basilisk!’

The Mage spoke in tones so solemn that he awed every tendency to frivolity in the lad’s nature.

‘The basilisk?’ he asked; ‘what is the basilisk like?’

‘When first you see it,’ answered the old man, ‘it will be like a crowned serpent with scales of green and gold. It has deadly fascination in its glance. If once you allow that glance to pervade your imagination, and paralyse your will, it will go ill with you. O Florian! beware of the basilisk! When you see it, fly from

it ; and if you cannot fly from it, trample on it. Never tamper with it ; never suffer yourself to fall under its fatal spell.'



ALCIPHRON AND FLORIAN

Florian caught the old man's hand. . 'Oh, sir,' he said, 'this is very terrible. Can you give me nothing—no amulet—to protect me from this basilisk and its dreadful glance?'

‘I can,’ said the Mage ; ‘but the force of amulets depends solely on the user. They lose all efficacy unless he who possesses them determines, at all cost of derision or self-denial, to keep and use them. And this he can only do if he seeks the help of his unseen Father.’

‘I will,’ said Florian ; ‘oh, I will keep and use my amulet !’

‘I trust that you will at least try,’ said the Mage. ‘See, then, I give you here a girdle of blue embroidered with gold ; gird it round your waist under your robe. If you would be safe, it must not be unloosed. Next, I give you this magic light enclosed in a crystal gem ; wear it also under your robe. Its gleam will flash out on any source of danger ; but it must be replenished, or it will die away and leave you in the dark without a friend. Lastly, I give you this little bell ; whenever you feel weak and afraid, whenever the lamp shows you that peril is near, ring the bell and succour will be sent to you, without which you would be weak and helpless.’

With a deeper awe than he had ever felt before, Florian took them. ‘Oh, my father, bless me !’ he said, looking up into the old man’s eyes.

Very tenderly the Mage laid his hand on the boy’s head and blessed him. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘my son, I bless you ; but the blessing from without depends on the heart within ;’ and, as he spoke, there was a tremor in the old man’s voice.

Then he summoned Ardens. But he had seen at a

glance that the dangers and difficulties of this elder boy would be quite different from those of the younger. He warned him indeed against the basilisk, but less solemnly than he had warned Florian. For he saw in Ardens an honest haughtiness, and natural reservedness of disposition, which he knew would rob the basilisk of nine-tenths of its power. It was the terror of the leopard's leap which he feared for Ardens, and to protect him he gave him a sword, to be secretly girded upon his thigh, of which he was ever to grasp the cross hilt, and draw from its scabbard when from the thicket he heard the leopard's snarl, or saw the glare of his fierce eyes.

But as he parted from the boys on the return of their father, he felt with a sigh that if Florian had listened to him with too weak an alarm, Ardens had perhaps received his warning with too bold a confidence in self.

II

Beato

Chi colla fresca gioventù nel viso

Move da prode ad incontrar la vita.—PRATI.

A FEW days afterwards, Florian and Ardens left the stately castle of their father, and went to face the circumstances which so often constitute a crisis in the life-histories of men, by entering the great Porphyrian place of education known as 'The Gate School.'

The brothers were widely unlike each other in

temperament. Their father had consigned them to the care of different tutors, and they saw but little of each other at school, and exercised no direct influence on one another's moral or intellectual development. This was all the more the case because they were not in the same house. The houses were named from different colours; Ardens was in the Red House, and Florian in the Blue.

The gay temperament and shallow versatility of Florian made him speedily forget the kind and solemn warnings of the Mage. There seemed to be nothing to alarm, everything to attract him, in his school life. His high birth, his beauty, his sprightliness, his undisguised pleasure in being courted and admired, soon made him a general favourite, but chiefly among the less manly and serious boys. It was not often that a new comer so rapidly sprang into popularity, or received such open adulation. Well taught at home, he found no difficulty in the studies of the place, and pleased the masters by his graceful and courteous manners. Active and vigorous, he held his own in the games without giving himself the trouble of any severe training. He was frankly delighted with the school, with his companions, and with all his surroundings.

He soon almost forgot that he had so much as heard that there was such a thing as the basilisk, or that it could be a source of danger to him. And the fiend was far too skilled a manager to shock him or to terrify him too soon. His object was to lull the boy into fancied security; to lead him thus to lay aside all

safeguards, and so to approach him when he was undefended and unprepared.

Florian was not indeed left wholly without warning. The dangers which arose from the insidious triumphs of the basilisk were so great that, at every fitting opportunity, and in every wise way, the best Porphyrian teachers endeavoured to turn the thoughts of their pupils so seriously to King Elyon, and their duties towards him and towards their own lives, that no boy could ever fall a wholly unwitting victim to Ashmod's snares. Even among the boys themselves the existence of this gliding enemy was a subject of allusion, often jesting, but sometimes serious. On the whole, however, Florian, while he was becoming oblivious of, or indifferent to, the existence of any peril, was secretly inclined to take the view of those who professed to be sceptical as to the existence of the crowned serpent, or thought that its supposed deadliness was exaggerated, if not wholly imaginary.

And thus it was that the boy laid aside one by one the amulets which the Mage had given him. Little by little he loosened the broided girdle, which at first he had worn tightly fastened round his loins. He soon came to regard it as needless, and then it became positively irksome. After a time he flung it aside altogether; chiefly because the friend who had taken most pains to ingratiate himself into his confidence had one day caught sight of it, pointed to it with a contemptuous gesture, and gone away with a hearty laugh.

This boy's name was Trypho, and Florian could not have chosen a less desirable friend. The same was true—though in a much lower degree—of another comrade to whom Florian felt strangely drawn. His name was Facilis. He was very unlike Trypho. Trypho liked to lord it over everybody. He only flattered that he might be sooner able to patronise and influence—*cuncta serviliter pro imperio*. Not so Facilis. He was of a very yielding disposition. There was something almost pathetic in the dependence which he placed on natures stronger than his own. Florian from the first seemed to have won his whole heart. There was nothing he would not do for him, and Florian could not help feeling attracted by one who really seemed to love him. And Facilis, had he been left alone, would have been the last person to do Florian any harm, if it were only because he so sincerely clung to him. But his mingled attractiveness and lack of firmness had enabled Trypho to acquire a sort of mesmeric power over Facilis. When he had first come as a new boy to the school, he had formed a false and admiring estimate of Trypho, which the latter had misused in such a way as to make him the unresisting henchman of all his purposes, though Facilis soon ceased really to care for him. Facilis was deeply to be pitied. He went astray only from weak complaisance. He had never learned to say 'no' to a bad companion. Even those who blamed him most severely yet often spoke of him as 'poor Facilis.'

The next amulet which Florian gradually rendered useless was the little crystal gem. Several times its

light had gleamed and almost blazed out, as the boy gave himself up more and more to the unwholesome influence of Trypho. But as Florian did not choose to heed the warning, and never took the least trouble to replenish the flame, its light sank to a tiny spark, and, after a few months, almost ceased to shine at all.

He still kept the little silver bell ; but as he scarcely ever thought of using it, he often forgot to take it with him. Meanwhile the basilisk—eyeing him unseen, ever creeping nearer and nearer to him through the fallen leaves, and allowing him now and then to get a passing indistinct glimpse of its iridescence—felt sure that, when he chose to flash full into sight, the boy would neither fly nor avert his glance, but would receive into his soul the deadly arrow of bewitchment which should empoison all his blood.

III

But you—ye are changed since I saw you last.

MRS. HEMANS.

AND so the first term at school passed away, and the time came when the boys were to go home for a holiday. A superficial observer would have said that Florian was much the same boy as he had been when he left his father's house. No one knew better than the basilisk that this was not the case ; nay, that everything was now prepared for his future conquest. He had already surrounded his victim with an atmosphere which was

intoxicating and subtly poisonous; he had put him completely off his guard, he had awakened in his mind the germs of a perilous indifference to all which was best.

The clumsier and more ignorant fiends in the court of Ashmod—where all are deeply interested in the common task of destroying the Porphyrians by alienating them from their true king—sneered at the basilisk for his supposed unsuccess. But the demon only looked down on them with a superior smile, and answered them with the one word, ‘Wait!’

Altus saw no difference in his beloved boy, except that he seemed more self-confident, more at home in society, more familiar with the world. He had lost none of his boyish beauty; the light was still in his eyes, and the bloom upon his cheek. He had brought back with him from school a fair report, except that his tutor had dropped a hint that he was a little promiscuous in his friendships, and should be careful not to ally himself too closely with boys whose influence on his moral life might not be good.

Altus read to his two sons the characters which they had received, and he questioned Florian about this warning.

‘Oh,’ said Florian, with easy nonchalance, ‘I’m all right. You would not have me give the cold shoulder to other boys when they are kind and civil to me? I don’t know what my tutor means by any one not influencing me for good. I can hold my own.’

‘Is it all right, Ardens?’ said his father. ‘You are

the elder brother, and should try to set Florian a good example.'

'You had better not ask me, father,' said Ardens. 'Florian takes his own line.'

'So do you, Ardens,' retorted the younger brother angrily.

'I am on my guard a little,' said Ardens. 'Nevertheless, if you would ever listen to me, which you never condescend to do, I should say to you exactly what your tutor says.'

'I don't understand you,' answered Florian. 'You choose your friends : I shall choose mine.'

'At any rate,' cried Ardens, 'I don't go about with——' He stopped short.

'Well? With—whom?'

'With Facilis, for instance.'

'Facilis ! poor Facilis is quite delightful. He would do anything for me. It is a shame of you to abuse him. Everyone likes Facilis.'

'Well, then, with fellows like Trypho,' said Ardens in an accent of scorn.

'Fellows like Trypho !' answered Florian, blushing hotly. 'Trypho is a good-looking and clever boy, high in the school, and he has always been kind to me. He's as good anyhow as your bosom friend Acer.'

'The idea of comparing them !' answered Ardens, who was rapidly losing his temper. 'Acer is as manly as Trypho is——' Again Ardens stopped short.

'Hush !' said the Duke. 'I will not allow you boys to quarrel in my presence. But, Florian, if your friend

Trypho is not a desirable associate for you, I wish you would drop his acquaintance.'

'Ardens has no right to hint that he is not, father,' said Florian. 'Let him mind his own business.'

When they left their father's library, Florian—all the more indignant because his sore conscience told him that there was truth in what his brother had said—could hardly restrain his anger, though he was always afraid of the force and impetuosity of Ardens. But the flattery which he had received at school made him less tolerant of any disdain or opposition, and he could not help bursting out with the remark:

'You were a sneak to abuse my friends like that.'

'A sneak!' said Ardens, flaming out at once, for to him the taunt was peculiarly hateful. 'Say that again if you dare!'

'It was no business of yours to abuse Facilis and Trypho,' said Florian, a little cowed.

'I didn't want to say much against Facilis. I don't think there's much harm in him. I know you have asked father to let him stay here with us, and I don't mind if he does. I am sorry I mentioned him.'

'Well, you shamefully maligned Trypho, anyhow.'

'I didn't malign him. I refrained from saying what he was. I despise him, and never conceal it.'

'I don't care for your opinion,' said Florian. 'It's all your conceit. You think yourself a most magnificent swell, and are always ready to sneer at every one's faults except your own. But for all that you are a——'

‘Say it if you dare!’

Florian should have taken warning, for his brother’s eyes were gleaming with anger; but his own vanity had been seriously ruffled, and he said:

‘Well, if you dare me—you are a sneak!’

Scarcely had he uttered the word when a strong blow from his brother’s fist knocked him to the ground.

He rose pale and trembling; and Ardens, instantly repenting, tried to grasp his hand, and said, ‘Forgive me, Florian, I was wrong. That wild beast against whom the Mage warned me sprang on me with a tiger’s leap, and I was not on my guard. Forgive me, my brother!’

But Florian pushed aside his outstretched hand. ‘I hate you, Ardens,’ he said; ‘I will never forgive you—never!’

Florian went to his room to nurse his anger. ‘I wish I was back at school,’ he thought. ‘There every one made much of me. Here this brute Ardens hits me on the face and knocks me down.’

At this moment his father entered the room.

‘I overheard you boys quarrelling,’ he said. ‘What is that bruise on your cheek?’

Florian looked in a glass, and saw that the blow, of which he still felt the smart, had indeed left a dark bruise. ‘Ardens struck me,’ he said.

‘Ardens!’ called his father—for he saw the elder boy seated sadly under a tree on the lawn—‘come here!’

‘Look, Ardens,’ said Altus; ‘is that bruise on your brother’s cheek your handiwork?’

‘It is, sir,’ answered the boy sadly. ‘I grieve to say that I utterly lost my temper. I am very sorry. I asked Florian to forgive me, but he won’t.’

Florian stood there sullen and irresponsible, and the Duke looked from one to the other.

‘Ardens,’ he said, ‘I am ashamed of you, and to punish you I shall not take you hunting with me for a week. But your frank confession and apology have partly atoned for your misconduct. Florian, did you do nothing to provoke him?’

Florian pouted in obstinate silence.

‘Answer me,’ said his father.

‘He began it,’ was the ungracious reply.

‘He has confessed his fault, and is sorry for it. Forgive your brother.’

Florian was still silent.

‘Did you hear me?’

‘I forgive him,’ answered the boy sullenly, ‘since you order me,’ and he coldly touched his brother’s hand.

Altus was grieved. There came to his mind the lines of a poet :

Forgive? How many will *say* forgive, and find
A sort of absolution in the sound
To hate a little longer.

‘I am afraid,’ he said, ‘that school has had no good influence on either of you. If this kind of thing is to go on, I shall seriously think of removing you. You would not have behaved like this to each other six months ago.’

‘Oh, don’t remove us, father!’ said both boys at once.

‘It would look as if we had been expelled for something disgraceful,’ said Ardens; ‘we should never get over it.’

‘I will not quarrel with Ardens again,’ said Florian eagerly. ‘Do let us go back.’

‘Father,’ added Ardens, ‘a good deal of the quarrel was my fault. If you will trust me, I will try not to let it happen again. Perhaps I was a little unjust to Trypho in my prejudice against him, and I certainly was unjust to Facilis. Father, Florian wants you to let Facilis come and stay with us. Will you?’

‘Ardens,’ said the Duke, ‘if you did wrong, you have had the courage to confess it. Florian will, I am sure, feel that you have been generous in your expression of regret. Yes, you may invite Facilis here if you wish.’

So Facilis came and charmed them all, even Ardens and the Duke, with his sweetness of character and the evident depth of his love for Florian. In healthy surroundings Facilis was all that is good, and the generous manliness of Ardens exercised on him a most wholesome influence.

One day the two brothers took him all over the castle, and showed him its treasures.

‘What happy and lucky fellows you two are!’ he said with a sigh. ‘You are rich, you are of high birth, you are clever. I am a fatherless boy, with no gifts and no prospects.’

‘You are yourself, Facilis,’ said the Duke, who had

overheard the remark. 'That is gift enough ; and, at any rate, my boy, you have the gift of making yourself beloved by those who know you. That is a very precious endowment.'

'O sir, you are far too kind to me,' said Facilis ;
'and so are your sons.'

IV

Yea, thou heardest not ; yea, thou knewest not ; yea, thine ear was not opened.—*Isaiah* xlviii. 8.

No other incident of importance occurred during the holidays, but towards their close the Duke said, 'My boys, I shall pay a visit to-morrow to my friend Alciphron ; and I want you to come with me.'

'I should like it very much,' said Ardens. 'He is a dear old man, and his gallery is full of the most delightful pictures.'

Florian blushed a little, and pouted, and said nothing.

'Don't you wish to see Alciphron again ?' asked Altus.

'I don't mind,' said Florian ; 'but I hope——'

'Finish your sentence.'

'Well, he is rather fond of sermonising, is he not ?'

'Is every kind word of warning and encouragement to be called sermonising, Florian ? If you think so you may hear sermons of a very different kind some day—'

spoken by voices which you cannot silence—voices full of thunder, rolling over your life and soul.’

Florian felt a little ashamed of his pertness, and said that he should like to go.

Accordingly they went to the house of Alciphron, who welcomed them heartily. Yet even as he grasped their hands, his clear and kindly gaze seemed to read—and in a measure did read—their inmost hearts. Ardens met his look with perfect frankness. Not so Florian. He looked up at the Mage boldly, half defiantly, but almost instantly dropped his eyes. Alciphron saw at a glance that, though he had not indeed been finally bewitched by the basilisk, yet something of the fiend’s penetrating venom had been diffused through the air which the boy had breathed. He saw too that Florian would not open his heart to him ; that he desired no advice, no help ; that he was determined to walk in his own way. Hence the old man, while treating him with conspicuous kindness, did not even attempt to pry into the secrets of his soul, or to give him advice, which would have been resented, and would only have done harm.

Yet an indirect opportunity of wakening serious thoughts occurred spontaneously when the elder boy eagerly asked him to come with them into his gallery and explain some more paintings to them.

The first picture about which Ardens asked was one in which a gaunt yet splendid figure of an old man lay, apparently dying, beside a sacrifice which he has offered.

‘That,’ said the Mage, ‘is an imaginary incident in the lives of those two brothers of whom you read at the beginning of Elyon’s book. In a fit of mad, uncontrollable passion, caused by jealousy, the elder smote and killed the younger. Thenceforth he went through life with a mark upon his forehead, and he lay under the curse of his own conscience. But that avenging angel accompanied the wanderer, and with still small voice at last broke down his obduracy. And when he was old—delivered, or half delivered, from his long despair—he made his way to the deserted altar by which he had slain his brother, and offered a sacrifice, and cried for pardon and died leaning upon the altar. The painter means to indicate that his cry was heard ; for now the angel of conscience is pleading for him, and a gleam of heaven’s own light is visible far off through the midnight clouds.’

Ardens listened intently. He thought of what had occurred so recently, when, in a blaze of anger, he had struck Florian and left a mark which was still faintly visible upon his cheek. He said nothing, but a shade of sorrow passed over his face.

Not far from this was a picture in which a mermaid is dragging a beautiful but lost and dying youth under the cold green waters. On her face is the intense malignity of cruel triumph and cruel scorn ; on his the agony of frustration and of death. Something about it struck the imagination of Florian, and he asked what it was intended to mean.

‘Read the motto,’ said the Mage.

Florian read,

Habes quod tota mente petisti
Infelix !

‘ You know what that means ? ’ said the old man. ‘ You see it is an illustration on what a great writer has said, that unlawful pleasure is delusive and envenomed pleasure. Its hollowness disappoints at the time ; its poison cruelly tortures afterwards ; its effects deprave for ever.’

‘ I should fancy,’ said Ardens, ‘ that the painter must have been thinking of the poem I had to learn at school, called “ The Fisherboy ” :

Sie sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm ;
Da war’s um ihn gescheh’n :
Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin
Und ward nicht mehr geseh’n.’

‘ You are right, Ardens,’ said the Mage with an approving smile. ‘ The motto of the picture might be, “ Who bewitched you ? ” The painter meant to indicate the curse of wrong-doing in the very moment of its gratification.’

Florian said nothing, but Alciphron detected a slight look of supercilious incredulity about his lips. Yet apparently he wanted to change the subject, for, looking at another painting, he said :

‘ What a very curious picture this is ! ’

The picture to which he pointed was one of remarkable beauty. The central incident of it represented a child on the platform of a loggia before a seated king.

Between him and the king is a quaint monster, at once hideous, terrific, and contemptible. It is winged, and has strong fierce talons, but it has ears like that of an ass, strong bristles, and a head something between that of a cat and a donkey. The mouth is open to emit a savage roar ; the sharp teeth are revealed ; and one paw is uplifted. Its roar is directed against the little boy at whom it glares ; but he stands perfectly calm, perfectly unmoved, in his rude and simple dress, with the long fair hair flowing over his neck and shoulders. He is advancing towards the odious monster, but the aureole of saintly innocence is round his brow ; his eyes are uplifted, his hands are clasped in prayer.

‘That,’ said Alciphron, ‘represents the legend of St. Tryphonius, who subdued by prayer and innocence the monster which could not be subdued by the warrior’s spear.’

‘But what is the monster meant for?’ asked Ardens.

‘It is meant for a basilisk, whom, in the legend, the young boy Tryphonius overcame,’ said Alciphron, purposely avoiding all indication that he had seen the blush which now covered with crimson the face and neck of his younger hearer.

‘I don’t know much about the basilisk,’ said Ardens, ‘but I thought it always appeared as a green, glittering serpent with a crown on its head—a sort of king serpent.’

‘You are right,’ answered the Mage ; ‘but the painter followed his own bent, and he wished to represent allegorically at once the detestable character of the creature, and its essential impotence.’

‘I like this picture better,’ said Florian hastily, as though to escape the subject.

‘So do I,’ said Ardens. ‘You need not explain that, sir. It is St. George and the Dragon. What a superb rider, and what a strong horse, and what a rush and fury in the charge! I love the noble face of the knight,’ said Ardens enthusiastically. ‘Look at that splendid torrent of rippling golden hair!’

‘But his lance has splintered between the dragon’s jaws,’ said Florian.

‘True,’ said the Mage; ‘yet his sword is by his side for further combat if necessary.’

‘I wish the painter had not spoiled the picture with those ghastly half-eaten corpses, and wriggling adders and horrors. The spiky disgusting dragon was enough.’

‘All that was a part of the painter’s necessary meaning, Florian. Every St. George must charge the dragon through the valley of the shadow of death, in which the monster lives and moves and has his being.’

‘Why has he put those spiral shells in front?’ asked Ardens. ‘Are they only for ornament?’

‘No,’ said Alciphron; ‘but for the same reason as the painter has placed a spiral shell in the hand of the young satyr in that other picture there, which I showed you not long ago. The shells are meant to be symbols of exhausted passions. But I see you don’t altogether care for my pictures, Florian; we will join your father.’

Ardens would have liked to stay longer, but the

Mage did not attempt to add any further instructions, for he saw that the younger boy was in a bad mood. It is useless, he murmured to himself,

θρηνεῖν ἐπωδὰς πρὸς τομῶντι πῆματι.

A charm is unavailing when the knife is needed.

When the boys left, he merely wished them a very kind farewell, and gave them his blessing. But as they passed along the avenue of plane trees which led from his house he gazed after them, not without deep sadness, shaking his head.

‘I do not greatly fear for Ardens; it is for that beautiful lad, Florian, that I am anxious,’ he said to himself. ‘I see that already he has laid himself open to the snares of the basilisk. Alas! Alas! Can the soul never learn without the rod of experience, that sternest of all teachers? And why are even her lessons so often administered too late, or in vain? But,’ he added as he raised his hands and eyes to heaven, ‘though life be dark, a ray of eternal light shall one day enlighten it; and

All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found at the close.

And yet—and yet——’ He said no more, but a moment later bowed his head, and murmured,

‘God’s in His heaven;
All’s well with the world.’

V

There on that side, where no defence doth lie
For that small valley, was a serpent seen ;
Such, maybe, led Eve bitter fruit to try.
That evil snake wound grass and flowers between,
Wriggling its head at times, and licking well
Its back as when a beast itself doth clean.

DANTE, *Purg.* viii. 97. (PLUMPTRE.)

THE second term at school was often the most decisive of character for a Porphyrian boy. The novelty had worn off ; timidity had vanished ; conversations were more free ; comrades were less shy of revealing themselves in their true character. Florian was still in the full bloom of his popularity, and Trypho, older than he, and in his way a leader among the boys, seemed even more eager than at first to be his chosen companion. The basilisk began to be more freely alluded to, and—by those who had already become its votaries—in a way expressly designed to stimulate curiosity. The powers of evil are adepts at inducing their victims to pass from the dread and the hatred which they inspire in innocent souls, to light talk respecting them ; and from light talk to a passionate wish to know more about them ; and from the curiosity to the desire ; and from the desire to the impulse ; and from the impulse to the determination ; and from the determination to the evil act ; and from the act to the repetition ; and from the repetition to the

habit; and so from the habit to the character, and to the hateful, abject, intolerable servitude.

We are not worst at once; the course of evil
Begins so slowly, and from such slight source,
An infant's hand might stem the breach with clay;
But let the stream grow wider, and philosophy,
Aye, and religion too, may strive in vain
To stem the headlong current.

Florian—his loins ungirded, his light unburning, his bell, given him to keep off the demons, unused and forgotten—was borne along the full tide of boyish happiness. He was bright, popular, successful, without a care—caressed and spoilt, because of his rank and wealth and fair face. He was having showered upon him all sorts of blandishments and flatteries. He was flourishing like a green bay tree, and he dreamt neither of the chilling frost nor of the worm which might cause the root to be as rottenness, and the blossom to go up as dust. He was living as though he were nothing more than the beautiful creature of a day which should have no ending in night. It never occurred to him to remember that evil and danger were all about him, that he was surrounded by unseen enemies, that his sole security lay in not suffering them to have the smallest part in his being. He never realised that favour is deceitful and beauty vain, and that our acts are seeds which ripen into ambrosial or empoisoned fruit.

And thus, in his case, as in the case of all, 'the tempting opportunity' came with overpowering force

to 'the susceptible disposition;' and when it came it found him not only unprepared to resist, but in the secretly cultivated disposition to succumb.

It had been a radiantly happy day of sunshine and holiday and summer bloom. Florian, like many of the boys around him, had never of late given one serious thought to the duties of his condition. Not one hour from morn till dewy eve had been tinged with a more sober colouring than that of immediate enjoyment. This might have been natural to his age, and even harmless, if he had faithfully consecrated the day, were it but for one moment, by 'bent head and beseeching hand;' had he but placed his imperilled youth under the care of the Powers which tend the soul. But neither at morn when he arose, nor at night when he lay down to sleep, nor by a single uplifting of his heart in a cry for help or a murmur of self-dedication, had Florian so much as once, for many days, looked beyond the narrow horizon of his own being. He was content with himself; he relied on himself. Conceit, which had always been one of his failings, was gratified to the uttermost. He imagined that there never was a boy so good looking, so charming, so universally admired as himself. The unclouded brightness of his present enjoyments sufficed him. Life flashed for him like a shallow streamlet amid the summer blossoms, and he did not choose to notice how often such lives become polluted with alien influxes; or stagnate in subterranean depths; or are lost under the dense shadows of impenetrable woods.

A warm sunset, with its air full of music and perfume, tempted him into the garden of the school, which was fringed on one side by a great forest. He reclined by himself on the green grass. The scent of roses was round him. He had been very successful that day in the school games, and no one else had been applauded so loudly. He felt inclined to plume himself on the endowments which had been lavished on him from his birth, and he secretly looked down on boys less attractive and engaging. In his pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, with no misgivings to trouble him, life seemed to him eminently worth living for its own sweet sake.

He was inhaling the scent of the flowers, plucking their bright petals, and giving himself up to the indulgence of the *dolce far niente*, when, suddenly—what was that movement in the soft grass, that stirring of the flowers? What was that flash and gleam, which seemed to add to his thoughts a new attractiveness, and to promise him ‘unimaginable realms of faerie’ beyond the present?

A brighter flash, and he instantly became aware that the basilisk, against which he had been so earnestly and lovingly warned, was close by him, was within touch of him, was beginning to creep out of the shelter of leaves and blossoms. He was instinctively conscious that in one moment more it would be completely visible—all poison and lustre and flame. He saw the green and glittering scales; he saw the semblance of the golden crown on its



HE BECAME AWARE THAT THE BASILISK WAS CLOSE BY HIM

head ; one second more and, if he did not fly or avert his glance, those eyes, like burning carbuncles, would be fixed full on his own, with their thrilling bewitchment. And he knew—though he secretly professed to disbelieve—that the wilful yielding to that deadly fascination would mean certain loss and anguish, and the potentiality of awful ruin. For he knew that to encourage the basilisk was tantamount to saying, ‘Evil, be thou my good.’ Yet he felt helpless to escape, or turn his eyes away. Nay, much more than this, he felt a mad longing to gaze at the creature once for all, to clasp it to his heart, and fling to the winds all fear or doubt.

The scale in the balance of his destiny was trembling on its descent to the wrong side ; but Elyon, the Lord of his life, who is very merciful to all his children, and who was grieved at the peril of this fair young being, gave him yet another chance of deliverance. Indeed, it was a matter of universal experience among the Porphyrians that their great, unseen, long-suffering King put a strong barrier between them and their first transgressions. The records of thousands of them proved that ere they could begin a course of peril and disobedience, they found themselves, as it were, in a narrow place where there was no turning either to the right hand or to the left ; where spirits of mercy, with drawn swords in their hands, met them ; and where even the dumb creatures seemed to speak to them in voices of warning. It was only when they pressed on, in spite of the warnings, that the path thereafter

became fatally easy to them. After that, they were let alone; they were suffered, as it were, to walk beside the precipice which they sometimes only saw the moment before they were hurled over it, and sometimes only just in time to turn back and flee from the overwhelming peril.

Florian was not left without his warning. He was on the point of stretching out his hand to touch the basilisk, and gaze into its deathful eyes, when he was startled by a noise of wings, and saw a white dove flying off with utmost haste, as though in wild alarm, dropping a torn feather in its flight. It had ventured to snatch some grains out of a trap, which suddenly falling would have broken its wing if it had not sped so rapidly away. And while he was involuntarily gazing on its hurried flight, he saw an eagle dart down from the blue sky upon a black snake. The bird fixed its talons into the creature's back; but the snake whirled its coils about the outspread wings and body, and strove to crush its enemy. Florian could not help gazing on the struggle; but it only lasted a minute. The eagle drove its beak into the serpent's head, and the creature, unwrithing its coils, dropped through the air upon a rock, where its vertebræ were broken into fragments. Unconsciously Florian saw in the dove's flight the escape of a soul from dangerous temptation; in the eagle's victory over the serpent a type of the possibility of conquest. He felt the spell of the basilisk; but he had just sufficient strength to turn away from it, to close

his eyes hard, and to cover them with both his hands.

Yet he had not wholly escaped the accursed sorcery. When he opened his eyes, the sun was setting, and the basilisk was no longer visible, though he felt that it was near. He hurried back ; for the evening bell was ringing which was the signal for all the boys to come in.

VI

Adeo mature a rectis in vitia, a vitiis in prava, a pravis in præcipitia pervenitur.—VELL. PATERC. ii. 10.

THE next few days he was miserable. He had for once escaped, but his thoughts reverted constantly and voluntarily to the basilisk. He knew that it would return ; he persuaded himself that it was useless for him to attempt permanent resistance ; he hated the anxiety ; he hated the suspense ; he hated the restraint. He felt the inner workings of the bewitchment ; he more than half regretted that he had not yielded. Alas ! he had never learnt to look upward. He felt a perilous impulse to gaze into the depths. His desire to know more of the basilisk was intensified ; he sought its return and wished to sate himself with its subtly-proffered benefits. The sole force which kept him in check was not rectitude, but vague alarm at past warnings. Uninfluenced by shame at leaving what was noble for what he felt to be base, the only barrier left

between him and the passion of disobedience was the barrier of fear. If he could but be sure that any of his comrades had transferred their allegiance from Elyon to the basilisk, and had suffered no harm, not one hindrance would remain to prevent him from following their example.

Trypho was now his closest friend, his daily companion ; and he felt a sort of instinctive conviction that Trypho could tell him, if he chose, all that he wanted to know about the basilisk.

A few days later he was resting with Trypho in the summer noon on a bank bright with poppies, under the shadow of a great tree. Each was aware of the other's thoughts, but neither spoke until the light breeze blew open the upper fold of Trypho's tunic, and Florian caught a glimpse of a small enamelled ornament attached to a thin chain round his friend's neck. Trypho, noticing the boy's glance, covered the badge, but with a smile which made Florian ask what that green jewel was.

‘What do you suppose it is?’ said Trypho.

‘Is it one of Elyon's amulets?’ asked Florian hesitatingly.

‘No,’ said Trypho, laughing. ‘Elyon? Who has ever seen him? He is a mere name. Have you any of those sham charms?’

‘I had,’ said Florian ; ‘but —’

‘Oh, I understand,’ said Trypho, laughing again ; ‘they were all very well for the nursery ; but now we are no longer babies.’

As Florian heard the sneer, there seemed to flash through his soul the words, 'Be not children in understanding, *but in wickedness be ye babes.*' But he rejected the warning, and said, after an instant's pause,

'Well then—is it any secret what that enamel is?'

'Do you really want to know?' asked Trypho.

'Yes.'

'But you will be horrified.'

'Are we not friends, Trypho? Why should I be horrified?'

'You will keep my secret?'

'Of course.'

'Well then,' said Trypho, pulling out the ornament, 'you shall see it——'

It was a little figure of the basilisk, wrought in green enamel, with a tiny crown of gold round its head and two carbuncles for eyes. Florian, as he handled it, grew pale and trembled; for in the field path, just below the bank where he and Trypho were sitting, a child was passing, and as he went by he was singing, unconscious of any hearer, the verse of an old song with the refrain,

'Beware, oh beware!'

and somehow in the word '*Beware!*' there seemed to the ear of Florian to be a note of unearthly warning. But the effect of the sweet voice was at once scattered by the light laugh of Trypho.

'Why, Florian,' he said, 'you look as if you had seen a ghost! It is only a harmless ornament.'

‘But it is a figure of’—Florian almost gasped as he uttered the word—‘of the basilisk.’

Trypho laughed long and loud. ‘Well, and what if it is?’

‘But,’ said Florian, ‘I thought that the basilisk darted poison from its glance, and was our enemy.’

‘Oh, you dear young innocent,’ said Trypho.

‘Well, but is not the basilisk a baneful, deadly creature, which ruins those who tamper with it?’ said Florian, nettled by Trypho’s air of superior knowledge.

The laugh of Trypho only became more gay; but at last he said, ‘Nonsense, Florian; mere nurses’ tales and old wives’ fables. You are no longer a child.’

‘But, Trypho, have you ever made friends with the basilisk?’

‘Of course, and lots of other fellows.’

‘Any that I know?’

‘Oh, you young innocent,’ said Trypho again. ‘Any that you know? Why, yes, nearly all your chief chums.’

‘Facilis, for instance?’

‘Yes, the harmless young Facilis, and Rhodon, and Cyprius, and Thallus, and lots more.’

‘And the basilisk has done them no harm?’

‘What harm has it done them?’

A voice in Florian’s heart seemed to say to him, ‘It has made them idle, and self-indulgent, and disloyal, and unmanly, and selfish, and traitors to what is good.’ But, after after a pause, he asked:

‘Have you never been sorry that you let the basilisk look at you?’

‘Sorry? Not I! Why shouldn’t we enjoy life, and do as we like?’

‘Do the other fellows in the house wear this badge?’

‘Yes: ask any one of them you please.’

‘Even Facilis?’

‘Yes, even the angelic Facilis who is so fond of you.’

‘What does the badge mean?’

‘It means that we have joined the Society of the basilisk.’

‘O Trypho! does not that mean that you leave the King Elyon for Ashmod?’

‘Ashmod?’ said Trypho. ‘Stuff and nonsense! There’s no such person as Ashmod.’

Florian was silent.

‘My dear fellow,’ said Trypho, passing an arm round his shoulder, ‘I never asked you to join the friends of the basilisk: now, did I?’

‘No, not in so many words.’

‘Well, then, we need say no more about it. You can do as you like. Let’s go in to dinner.’

Florian was determined to see what Facilis would say about the basilisk. With him he could speak freely. So, as he sat by him, he said straight out:

‘Facilis, Trypho says you wear the badge of the basilisk round your neck. Is that true?’

‘Hang Trypho!’ exclaimed Facilis, springing up and stamping his foot; ‘I hate him for telling you.’

‘But do you?’

‘Don’t ask me, Florian.’

‘But we are friends, Facilis, and I really want to know.’

‘I can’t and won’t tell you.’

‘Then that means that you *do* wear it; for if you didn’t you would at once say, “No, I don’t.”’

‘Ah, don’t despise me, Florian. I am a poor weak fellow.’

‘Nay, you are a very dear fellow, Facilis. And why should I despise you? I am thinking of wearing the badge too.’

‘Oh, don’t! don’t! don’t!’ said Facilis. ‘Ah, I see; Trypho has been trying to mislead you, as he misled me.’

‘Why, the basilisk has done him no harm, and you no harm.’

‘Hasn’t it?’ said Facilis. ‘Ah! you don’t know!’

‘But I want to know.’

‘Dear Florian, don’t desire to know. From me you shall hear no syllable. And oh, Florian, though I say it, beware of Trypho, and don’t believe a word he says; but believe all that wise and good men tell you about the basilisk. He is the enemy of King Elyon.’

‘Then how about you, Facilis?’

‘Don’t ask about me. It has been very fatal to me all my life that I never had the moral courage to say no,’ answered Facilis, with deep dejection.

‘Trypho seems quite happy, and quite likes the basilisk.’

‘It might have been well for me, Florian, and for

many another, if Trypho had been a better fellow than he is—and more true to Elyon.'

'He says that that is only copybook morality; like the old *Ego sum puer bonus, et me Elyon amat.*'

'Copybook morality!' said Facilis very earnestly. 'Didn't you hear our President say the other day that all the work of life and the whole duty of man reduces itself to this: "Fear Elyon; keep his laws"? Don't you remember his saying that, so far from being commonplace, this has been taught in all ages and all lands by all the best teachers; that it is a rule, broad as the sea, clear as the blue sky, steadfast as the eternal hills? What can Trypho teach compared with this, except ruinous mischief?'

'I thought Trypho was your chief friend and chum,' said Florian.

To his great surprise Facilis burst into tears and abruptly left him.

VII

Φθείρουσιν ἡθη χρηθ' δμιλίαι κακάι.

MENANDER (quoted 1 Cor. xv. 33).

THUS Facilis, though to his own misery he had been personally weak, did honestly try his best to save Florian from succumbing to the evil influences which had been his own bane. But Florian had been too wilfully careless in allowing the basilisk to gain an influence over his mind, and, in spite of the warning of his friend, determined to talk about the demon to

other boys in his house more gay and audacious than the half-repentant Facilis.

He thought that he would first speak to Rhodon ; for Rhodon was a boy of quick intelligence and pleasant manners, who had read more than most of the Caeruleans (as the boys in the Blue House were called) ; and he was the son of a nobleman whose park bordered on the estate of Duke Altus.

‘Rhodon,’ he said, the first time that he found him sitting alone, ‘I want you to tell me the truth about the basilisk.’

‘What do you want to know?’ said Rhodon.

‘Well, I know that you have let him come to you, for Trypho told me so. Why did you leave King Elyon’s service for his?’

‘My father is a very clever man,’ answered Rhodon, ‘and I know that he does not believe in King Elyon at all, or doubts whether he troubles himself about us ; for one day, when he did not know that I was in the room, I heard him say so. If he doesn’t believe in Elyon, why should I?’

‘You horrify me,’ said Florian.

‘Well, then, let us drop the conversation,’ answered Rhodon with a shrug of his shoulders.

‘No, but what good did you get by welcoming the basilisk?’

‘I got freedom,’ said Rhodon.

‘What do you mean exactly, Rhodon?’ And at that moment there gleamed into Florian’s memory a sentence about a service which is *perfect* freedom.

‘Think of the lecture the President gave us the other day and you will see. From first to last, he kept saying, “You must deny yourselves; you must abstain; you must give up.” His whole advice was, “Sustain and abstain; desist from evil; resist temptation; persist in effort.” I tell you frankly I don’t care to toil and moil through life in that way. My father has many guests, brilliant, clever, handsome men of high positions. They don’t talk in that way; they don’t live like that. Neither will I. I am much more inclined to follow the rule, “Eat, drink, enjoy thyself; the rest is nothing.”’

‘And is that what you advise me to do?’

‘I advise you nothing,’ said Rhodon, who was noted in the school for his haughty independence. ‘Join the saints if you like it better.’ And, to put an end to further questions, Rhodon took up the book which he had been reading.

Still restless, still miserable, Florian thought that he would find out what Cyprius and Thallus had to say on the subject. The two were inseparable friends, and finding them one day sitting in the school garden, he asked if he might come and sit with them.

‘By all means,’ they said, for Florian was a welcome companion among the Caeruleans.

‘Forgive my curiosity,’ he said, ‘and tell me whether you two wear the badge of the basilisk, as Trypho told me you do.’

The two boys exchanged smiles and glances, and Cyprius asked, ‘Shall we tell him, Thallus?’

‘Certainly,’ answered Thallus. ‘Look here, Florian,’ and each of them showed him the enamel badge worn round their necks under their tunics.

Florian again examined the badge with curiosity. ‘But what do you *mean* by wearing the badge?’ he asked.

‘We mean,’ said Thallus, ‘that we will follow our bent, and not be checked at every turn by a parcel of cut-and-dried rules; we mean to please ourselves and live as we like.’

‘Yes, and to talk as we like,’ said Cyprius; ‘and to think as we like, and do as we like. There, Florian; now the secret’s out. That’s our motto.’

‘I should like to write it down,’ said Florian.

‘Do,’ said Thallus. ‘Write at the top, “The boon of the basilisk,” and under it “Live as you like.” Have you written that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Under that write in three lines “Talk as you like,” “Think as you like,” “Do as you like.” Now show me what you’ve written, and let me see if it’s all right.’

Florian handed them his ivory tablet, unconscious that a strange marvel had happened to him. For as Thallus spoke in a tone of brazen assurance, with each sentence there had been a flash, a thrill, a whisper in Florian’s conscience, which impressed on his mind the opposite thought. And so vivid had been the impression, that, impelled by some unseen power—without his consent, against his intention, and indeed unknown

to himself—instead of what Thallus had dictated to him, he had written as follows :

‘The bane of the basilisk :

1. Dead while you live.
2. Vile words corrupt.
3. Wicked thoughts defile.
4. Thou hast destroyed thyself.’

Thallus read the sentences, and, turning on Florian with a burst of rage, cried out, ‘What humbug is this? Are you a spy on us?’

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Florian with intense surprise.

‘See what he’s written,’ said Thallus, handing the tablet to Cyprius. Then both boys eyed him angrily and suspiciously, with frowns upon their foreheads.

‘What on earth is the matter?’ asked Florian again, still more astonished.

‘Read what you have written,’ said Thallus, thrusting the tablet into his hand.

Florian in utter amazement read what he had written, and blushed crimson.

‘On my word of honour,’ he said passionately, ‘I thought that I had written down what you dictated. This must be some sorcery of the Mage.’

‘Likely!’ sneered Thallus.

The two boys rose and left him with flushed and angry countenances, and when they had gone Florian covered his face with his hands and wept.

It was a tremendous warning, and it was the last which was to be vouchsafed to him for many days.

VIII

Grave ipsius conscientiae pondus.

Cic., *De Nat. Deorum*, iii. 35.

HERE again was a decided check—a heaven-sent warning. For a time Florian paused in his evil course, and had he not wilfully hardened his heart all might now have been well. The impression, however, wore away. He persuaded himself that the Mage had practised his arts upon him. Though often reproved he hardened his heart. He had been much impressed by what Facilis had said; but instead of pondering over it he took the worst possible course by repeating the conversation to Trypho, omitting only all allusion to Trypho himself.

But Trypho assumed an air of disdainful indifference, and only condescended to say that Facilis was a poor fool, delightfully good-natured and charming, but faint-hearted and with nothing of a real man about him.

All that afternoon the thoughts of Florian were burning with a passionate desire to be visited by the basilisk again. When that is so, no Porphyrian has long to wait. That very evening the boy strolled to the sheltered nook of the garden where he had seen the creature glimmer among the flowers. Almost in a moment it flashed out upon him. He stretched out his

hand ; it fawned upon him, drowned him in glamour, and fascinated him with the full and final glance which involved its victory and the boy's defeat. He consciously took evil by the hand, and from the temple of his soul the cloud of glory moved away.

For a time he felt intoxicated and elated with fancied emancipation. The conceit of superior freedom made him seem as if he trod on air. At last he was unfettered by the shackles of 'copybook moralities.' He did not attempt to conceal from Trypho and Facilis and the rest that he too had imitated their courage in making friends with Elyon's enemy and flinging fears and scruples to the winds. And what harm had it done him ? None ! So he boasted to himself and to them. The basilisk was his obsequious slave, not his master ; and it was only out of regard for the maligned creature—whom he could kick away in a moment if he liked—not in sign of servitude, that he accepted the green enamelled badge and became its votary. Trypho smiled, but Facilis turned away and could not suppress a deep sigh.

The spell was not at once exhausted. It was specially delightful to the vain nature of Florian to observe that in the set of schoolfellows to whom he had joined himself, he was now more than ever an admired and flattered leader.

But very soon the unhallowed glow died at intervals from his flushed soul. No child of Elyon can listen to the voice of the serpent without many an

agonising reminder that he was made for that nobler service, which is perfect freedom. No soul which the son of Elyon died to save can pluck from the tree of knowledge its forbidden fruit without the anguish of feeling, sooner or later, that by his disobedience he has forfeited Eden, and that the fiery faces and horrent arms of the Avengers flame between him and the Tree of Life.

To Florian the reminder that the crown had fallen from his head, for he had sinned, came in many forms. There were thoughts, and hopes, and feelings, and memories, which before had been full of sweetness, but which now he could no longer cherish.

He felt himself to be an apostate from the best and highest which he had known, and that he could not profess continued allegiance to it without hypocrisy. The mere presence of other boys who shuddered at the thought of the basilisk was a silent rebuke to him. And while he was daily conscious, deep in his innermost being, of a subtle uneasiness, the freedom of choice, which he first thought that he had gained, became to him the most deadly of all losses. All that the basilisk could give him was the glamour over a galling servitude; the flicker of the mirage which leads those who follow it to wastes of barrenness in the thirsty sands.

One day he heard one of the other boys reading the story of the witch spinning in her cavern a thread so wondrously fine and thin that it was invisible except where it gleamed like golden gossamer in the light of

the odorous fire. And as the youth enters the cavern, and gazes at her, she sings,

‘ Now twine it round thy hands I say,
Now twine it round thy hands I pray !
My thread is small, my thread is fine,
But he must be
A stronger than thee,
Who can break this thread of mine.’

The youth in astonishment winds the thread around his right hand and his left, and then she sings,

‘ Now thy strength, O stranger strain !
Now then break the slender chain ! ’

He tries, and tries in vain, with all his strength to break it. It is a magic thread. By his own act he has made himself the helpless victim of his enemies. He is bound hand and foot.

Just such a victim Florian soon felt himself to be. It would have been easy to keep from rebellion against the Lord of his life ; but to recall that freedom when he had voluntarily flung it away was hard. He had of his own perverted will stepped out of the light into the darkness ; but, oh, would it be possible for him to retrace his footsteps and struggle into the light and air of innocence again ?

Any return to the ‘ unific rectitude ’ of an obedient life could only be attained by climbing the rocky and thorny mountain path of repentance ; and that painful toil he could not face. He sometimes tried, or fancied that he tried, to do so ; but his efforts to break the

spell of the basilisk were too discontinuous and too half-hearted to have in them any chance of success.

Trypho always laughed at such efforts, and constantly advised him to throw away all remorse, and all scruples, and all allegiance to Elyon, at which he sneered as a mere antiquated absurdity founded on outworn fables. And at last, Florian, in impatience and despair, determined to suppress every warning voice within him, to adopt a tone of defiance, and to make no attempt whatever to return to better things.

IX

Facilis descensus Averni ;
Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est.—VIRG.

E piedi e man voleva il suol di sotto.—DANTE, *Purgat.* iv. 33.

So closed the second term of Florian and Ardens at school, and they again returned home for their holidays. But each felt that he had drifted farther and farther apart from the other. The brothers were instinctively conscious that over one of them at least a change had passed ; that there was a widening chasm between their aspirations and desires. For now they scarcely ever saw each other at school. Florian had become the friend and leader of a set about whom Ardens knew little, but whom he could not help disliking and despising ; and Ardens had chosen his intimates among lads about whom Florian felt with intense resentment

that, so far from paying any court to him, as others did, they shrank from him and kept him at a distance.

Ardens had often felt a deep uneasiness about his brother; but Florian so resolutely closed the door against all confidences between them, and assumed such airs of disdainful indifference if his brother ever tried to say a serious word to him, that Ardens, perplexed and disheartened, knew of no way by which he could influence him for good. Then it occurred to him that perhaps Facilis—one of the few boys in the Blue house for whom he cared—might be able and willing to help him in saving Florian from plunging into a hopelessly bad career. One day, finding Facilis alone in the garden, Ardens came and spoke to him, and Facilis greeted him with warm cordiality.

‘I wish I saw more of you, Facilis,’ said Ardens; ‘but somehow the fellows in your house keep to themselves, and I can scarcely ever find you alone.’

‘At any rate you know, Ardens, how much I have always liked and looked up to you.’

‘I came,’ said Ardens, ‘to ask if you can do nothing to help my brother. I know his affection for you, and yours for him.’

‘I don’t deserve any one’s affection,’ said Facilis despondently; ‘but I would do *anything* for Florian.’

‘Are you satisfied with the way he is going on, Facilis? I don’t myself at all like the line he seems to be taking.’

‘I am the last person to have any right to judge or condemn him or any one,’ said Facilis.

‘But you are not satisfied with his ways?’

‘I might say that, if I had any sort of right to say it,’ answered Facilis, his face full of sadness.

‘Can you do nothing to advise or to help him?’

‘I have forfeited all claim to do so, Ardens. I have sometimes feebly tried to say something. But Florian is no worse than I am myself. He can twist me round his little finger. I have no power to influence others as he has, and my influence, compared to that of his friend Trypho, is as a spider’s thread to a cable.’

‘I wish I could get him out of the Blue house,’ said Ardens.

‘So do I with all my heart,’ said Facilis; ‘and would that I had not been in it! Oh, Ardens! if I were a good and strong fellow like you, I might help to save Florian. But I am nothing and nobody; and it requires some one far better than I am to be of any use.’

He wrung Ardens by the hand, and, as was usual with him when he could not trust himself to control his emotion, he turned away.

X

But life is stormy and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with those we love
Doth work like madness in the brain;
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart’s best brother.

COLERIDGE, *Christabel*.

OF course, when they were at home in the castle of the Duke, their father, Ardens and Florian were con-

stantly thrown together. But there all the circumstances were wholly different. There Florian was not surrounded by temptation and by bad companions, and he showed for the most part only the brighter side of his character, though even at home he resolutely prevented all approach to confidential conversation with his brother ; and this tended to keep them apart.

But one summer afternoon during those holidays the alienation between the two boys culminated, and culminated terribly. They had gone down to bathe in the river which flowed round the domain of Altus, and Florian, who was habitually careless and self-indulgent, forgot that he was wearing round his neck the enamelled badge of the basilisk. He took it off for his bathe, but flung it down carelessly upon his clothes, and thought no more about it.

Ardens was in the highest spirits.

‘ Now then, Florian ! ’ he exclaimed,

‘ *Desilit in latices, alternaque brachia ducens,
In vitreis translucet aquis.* ’

‘ Oh, no holiday tasks now ! ’ said Florian.

‘ Well then, Florian, let’s see which of us can take the best header. ’

They plunged with delight under the warm summer air into the bright water, and after a good swim climbed the bank to dress. While they were dressing Florian caught a glimpse of the hilt of the sword of Ardens.

‘ What is that ? ’ he asked curiously.

Now, it was understood that the gifts of Alciphron were for private use, and were never to be idly paraded. Ardens felt a little vexed with himself for his carelessness, but he answered quite simply :

‘It is an amulet, or whatever he calls it, given me by Alciphron.’

It was one of the marks of Florian’s degeneracy that he now always pretended to sneer when the Mage was mentioned.

‘An old proser,’ he said, ‘who talks baby nonsense.’

Ardens checked an impulse to anger, and said, ‘I suppose it was your friend Trypho who taught you to adopt that tone?’

‘And if he did,’ said Florian, ‘it is no concern of yours. I like Trypho; he is ten times more my friend than you are.’

‘So much the worse, my brother,’ said Ardens gently, after a pause. ‘But I should have thought that it did concern me a little, Florian.’

‘Oh, don’t try to assume the elder brother over me,’ said Florian. ‘It might have been different if you had ever cared for me at school, and not snubbed me, and tried to look down on me. I have got beyond all that now.’

‘Yes, and beyond a good many other things, Florian, not much to your advantage. Well, I never knew yet that you thought I wished to snub you, though, I confess, I don’t like your friends—except Facilis.’

‘I don’t care whether you do or no,’ said Florian

frigidly; 'and as for the old Mage, I don't want any more infant-school lectures of "Be good, be good, be good." They are as old as the hills.'

'Yes, and if you try to grasp their meaning,' said Ardens quietly, 'they are as splendid as the stars.'

'Oh how eloquent we are!' sneered Florian, and after that he sank into disdainful silence.

But Ardens had made many an earnest resolve that his brother's taunts, however intolerable he found them, should not carry him out of himself. So again he paused, and then said:

'I am afraid, Florian, that you have got to prefer the voices which say to all of us, long before we have left the nursery, "Be bad, be bad, be bad."'

Florian did not take the trouble to answer, so there the conversation might have ended, had not Ardens suddenly caught sight of the badge of the basilisk lying on Florian's shirt. He had heard something about this at school, but he still retained the healthy horror of the basilisk which he had learnt from every wise teacher he had ever heard, and he was not only amazed, but fairly alarmed to see the glittering badge of the enemy of Elyon lying amid the clothes of his brother, and evidently as an ornament which he had worn around his neck.

'Good heavens, Florian!' he exclaimed, pointing to the green enamel, 'what monstrous thing is that? I never saw it before, but it looks to me like an image of the basilisk.'

Florian instantly hid the badge in alarm, and turned his back on Ardens.

‘I *will* know what it is,’ said Ardens impetuously. ‘You shall not secretly sell yourself to Ashmod without my trying to prevent you.’

‘Mind your own business, Ardens,’ said Florian furiously. ‘What right had you to watch me while I was dressing, and to play the spy?’

‘I no more played the spy than you did, when you saw what I was wearing,’ answered Ardens, suppressing with difficulty his hot temper, and trying to speak calmly, though his voice shook a little. ‘I did but catch a chance glimpse of that badge.’

‘Badge?’ said Florian. ‘Who said it was a badge?’

‘Well, of that green ornament or whatever it is—just as you caught a glimpse of my sword, and——’

‘Oh, how fine we are, how good we are, with our sword!’ interrupted Florian, putting into his voice the most offensive tone of provocation.

The effort of Ardens to keep his temper was put to a very severe strain by the irritating tone which his brother seemed to be purposely adopting. He knew that the liability to bursts of anger was one of his chief temptations, and more than once it had caused him serious trouble at school. But now he almost heard the leopard—against which Alciphron had affectionately warned him—rustling amid the brushwood of the grove in which they were seated. His only safety lay in stopping to master himself before he spoke.

‘Florian,’ he said sternly, but not unkindly, ‘you

want to put me in a rage with you, as you did once before. Do not provoke me too far. I have a right to know what that thing is which you have been wearing round your neck.' And he advanced towards Florian with a determined look.

Florian sprang to his feet. 'You shall not know,' he said. 'You shall not pry and sneak on me. Keep your fine lectures to yourself. I hate you, Ardens. Stand back!'

'I mean nothing unkind, Florian, but I *will* know what you have been after.'

He put his hand with a firm grasp on the shoulder of his brother. But Florian was now not only thoroughly enraged, but genuinely alarmed. He wrenched himself out of his brother's grasp, and when Ardens again tried to seize hold of him, he struck him in the face with all his might.

Ardens seized the boy, threw his arms round him, flung him to the ground, and put his foot upon his breast. The leopard was stealthily creeping nearer and nearer to him, with its fiery eyes fixed upon him; and Ardens, overmastered by passion, would have been hurried into some act of fiercest violence, which he might have had to deplore all his life, if he had not at that very moment caught a glimpse of the silver cross which formed the hilt of the protecting sword which Alciphron had given him. Instead of striking Florian, he stretched out his hand to take his brother's odious badge. But Florian, in a transport of fury and despair, leapt up, and springing to the place

where the clothes of Ardens lay—for he was but half dressed—seized them in a mass, sword and all, and flung them into the river.

Ardens saw his sword sink, he saw his tunic floating down the stream. Never before had he received so deadly, so contumelious an insult. He forgot all about the basilisk, and was bent on inflicting upon his brother such a punishment as he never should forget. The leopard was now crouching for its deadliest spring; it bounded upon Ardens all flame and fury. Far stronger than Florian, Ardens seized the boy by the waist, lifted him up, and would in another moment have flung him bodily over the bank of the river, in a transport of ungovernable passion.

But up to this point Ardens had been stoutly and faithfully fighting against his besetting temptation, and therefore he was not abandoned to his spiritual enemy. Before he had been hurried into some irreparable act of rage, he suddenly heard a voice cry out, ‘Ardens! Ardens!’

His father had been looking for the boys, and not seeing them, or knowing where they were, was calling for him.

The voice recalled him to himself, changed his purpose, saved him from his impending sin. He checked himself with an effort, which left him trembling from head to foot, and, releasing his brother, said, ‘Shout back to father.’ Then, turning to the river, he dived in, half dressed as he was, to swim after his floating clothes and to recover his lost sword,

which he saw shining at the bottom of the clear water.

Florian hurriedly concealed the green jewel of the basilisk, and then called out, 'Here we are, father; we have been having a bathe.'

Ardens recovered his sword and his tunic, but it was with difficulty that he struggled back to the river bank. For though he had been successful in resisting the tremendous passion by which he had been suddenly assailed, that effort had shaken his whole frame. By this time his brother had dressed and gone to join his father. Ardens was alone; his clothes were dripping wet. He had to undress, to wring them dry, and to lay them in the sun which was now burning in the meridian. He sat down in a mood of extreme bitterness, and hid his face in his hands.

He had been victorious over sudden temptation. Nay, but had he? True, he had at first resisted its impulse, but nevertheless his enemy the leopard had nearly mastered him; he had not wholly escaped its cruel claws. Yet help from above had come to him in the decisive moment. He had been snatched from the leopard, even though he had not smitten it with his sword. But oh! what could he think of his unhappy brother? 'Am I my brother's keeper?' he asked himself, and the voice answered clear and loud within him, 'Indeed you are.'

Was it true, then, that at school he had despised and neglected Florian?

'I can do nothing with him,' he pleaded to himself.

‘He is conceited and wilful.’ ‘Have you really tried?’ answered the inward voice. ‘Might not more have been achieved by genuine brotherly love?’ ‘I am to blame,’ he thought; ‘I might have tried to do more for my brother. But ever since that unhappy blow on the cheek, Florian has resented my influence. O that I had not lost that battle! My fault! my fault!’

But now what was to be done? Florian was secretly wearing the badge of the basilisk; he must indeed have fallen terribly. And Ardens could only wring his hands, and then uplift his eyes shining with tears, in supplication to

The powers which tend the soul,
To snatch it from the death which cannot die,
And save it even in extremes.

Before the day was over, haunted by a word from Elyon’s book, which said, ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,’ Ardens sought his brother, and, humbling himself, begged that they might exchange forgiveness with each other, and be as friends and brothers. So far as words were concerned, Florian muttered a sullen consent. He gave Ardens his hand, but not his heart.

‘Florian,’ said Ardens, ‘apart from my outburst this afternoon, if I have really been cold or disdainful to you at school, I did not mean to be so. I find it difficult ever to see you. Forgive me, I will try to do better next term.’

‘Never mind,’ said Florian, ‘I have plenty of friends.’

‘And, O Florian,’ said Ardens, ‘you must not resent what I say again ; but will you—oh, will you fling away that horrid badge?’

‘If I choose to wear it I do not see that it hurts you,’ said Florian.

‘But it hurts yourself, my brother. The basilisk is the enemy of all good.’

‘It isn’t,’ said Florian. ‘It has done me no harm.’

‘I am not so sure of that,’ said Ardens ; ‘and if it has not, I am quite sure that it will.’

Now Florian was dreadfully afraid that Ardens would tell his father of his disgraceful abandonment of his allegiance to Elyon ; so he said, ‘Well, if you will let me alone and not betray me, perhaps I will throw the thing away.’

‘You promise?’

Florian said nothing ; he hesitated. Then, with a sudden cry, he seized his brother’s hand, and said, ‘O Ardens, you are a better fellow than I am. Yes, I will throw it away. At least I will try.’

When Ardens left him he took the chain off his neck, and flung it with the badge to the top of a high bookshelf, where he hoped that it would lie forgotten in the dust.

But the basilisk was not to be got rid of on such easy terms, though while the boy was at home it had more or less been letting him alone.

A morning or two afterwards he found the badge on his dressing table ; a servant, in cleaning out the room, had found it and left it there,

Then he flung it out of the window into the middle of a dense shrubbery ; but an hour or two later he saw that a tame magpie had found the glittering thing and was dragging it with his beak across the lawn. Afraid that his father would see it, he ran down and recovered it.

Then, but very half-heartedly, he broke the badge off the chain and tossed it into the artificial lake in the garden. He thought that now he was rid of it at last. But a strange thing happened. The lake was shallow ; the badge, which was quite small and light, had slipped through the water into the half-opened bud of a water-lily. In a day or two the lily reared its head above the surface and expanded its white and scented blossom. Florian was amusing himself by fishing in the lake, when he noticed something flashing in one of the white immaculate flowers by which he was surrounded. He pushed the boat through the dense green lily leaves to see what it was. He plucked the water-lily. There, among its yellow stamens, lay the shining badge, and the little carbuncles, which were its eyes, seemed to gleam with an unnatural lustre.

Here was another crisis in his life ! Again the warning came ; for suddenly, and quite near him, he heard a voice say loud and clear, ‘ Do not touch it ! ’

Pshaw ! it was only one of the gardeners on the island in the lake, telling his child not to pick up an adder which he had just struck with his spade.

‘ Shall I take it ? ’ Florian asked himself, half aloud.



HE PLUCKED THE WATER-LILY

‘You can’t help yourself, you must! Besides, look what a beautiful thing it is!’ seemed to whisper a soft insinuating voice. ‘Would you after all desert me, your kind and indulgent friend? You can’t, you know.’

Florian looked up. Upon a sunny bank, under festoons of the dark purple flowers of the deadly nightshade, stood the basilisk himself, and the golden circle seemed to gleam with unusual vividness round the king-serpent’s head. Once more the arrowy glance shot into the boy’s eyes.

‘It is my fate!’ he said, and seized the badge from the water-lily. He flung something away, but it was the immaculate flower, not the gleaming badge. And as the silver blossom plashed into the water, and as he hid the badge in the breast of his robe, he heard a low malignant laugh, and a huge raven croaked from the nest in the tree above his head.

But it was too late for warning. He had made his choice.

XI

Ever against the stream God’s man must row,
Easy thine oar, and devilward thou shalt go.

LAYBRIDGE.

AFTER their summer holidays the boys returned to school once more.

And at school Ardens again sought the society of the strongest, the manliest, and most right-minded

boys, while Florian became, together with Trypho, an acknowledged leader of those who, having practically forgotten the guide of their youth and forsaken the covenant of their God, had said in their hearts, if not in their open words, 'I choose the evil, and refuse the good.'

In this way things went on for several terms, during which the brothers seemed to drift farther and farther apart from each other. While Ardens was rewarded for honest and faithful efforts by confirmation of all that was best and noblest in his character, the unhappy Florian—all the more unhappy in that he did not recognise his peril—became more and more decidedly a follower of that which is evil.

After their second year at school was concluded, the circumstances of both brothers were complicated by the arrival at school of a new boy, who had indeed accompanied them all the way from the castle of Duke Altus, and had entered the school under their introduction.

His name was Candidus, and his face, in its winning openness, seemed to reflect his name. In age he was little more than a child, for he had not yet reached his thirteenth year; but it was impossible to look at him without regard and interest, for his features wore the impress of serene untroubled goodness, though they were easily touched with a modest blush. You could read all his thoughts: they shone through his eyes,

Like bottom agates seen to wave and shine
In crystal currents of clear morning seas.

He had none of the remarkable and aristocratic beauty of Florian, but there was no fairer specimen of innocent boyhood in the great Porphyrian school. His face was the reflex of a soul which resembled some silver mirror unstained by even a passing breath.

Candidus was not of noble birth like the two brothers. His father was a humble tenant on the estate of Duke Altus; but he was proud of his gifted and blameless boy, and one day he had asked the great nobleman how best to provide for the future of his son. The Duke had seen the boy, talked to him, and been much pleased with him. He thought that such a boy, though younger than his own two sons, would be a harmless and delightful companion to them; and as he was always kind and generous, he offered his tenant to provide for the education of Candidus, and to send him at his own expense to the school, which would otherwise have been far too costly for the means of one who occupied so humble a position.

So Candidus was presented to Ardens and Florian by their father, who placed the boy, as it were, under their protection, so far as his favourable introduction to the school was concerned. They took him on the journey with them, and were not sorry to return to their schoolfellows in charge of a lad who, they felt sure, would do nothing but credit to themselves and to the school.

Candidus felt confidence in Ardens at once. Something in the look of the young heir of Altus, who would one day succeed to the great ducal domains, won

the boy's esteem. He felt that he could implicitly trust him. He knew that Ardens would play no practical jokes upon him; would not mislead him with any 'crams'; would give him good, manly, useful counsel, and would be a strong and steadfast friend. Curiously enough he could not sincerely like Florian, who was usually regarded as the more graceful and attractive, as well as the better looking of the two brothers. Florian, on the other hand, felt strongly drawn towards him. He laid himself out to please the boy, answered more fully than Ardens his eager and anxious questions about the school, and, so far from assuming any airs of patronage, seemed almost timidly to court his friendship.

Candidus feared that his plebeian birth would lead to his being looked down upon, and that his comparative poverty would be a constant obstacle to his intercourse with his schoolfellows, since he could not join in all their subscriptions, or spend his money as they did. But his path was smoothed by his two friends. Ardens, in a perfectly frank and manly way, furnished the money which was necessary for the school subscriptions to games and so forth, telling Candidus that such had been the wish of the Duke, and that no one need be aware of it. Florian, on the other hand, gave him presents—which, though of greater value, he was far more reluctant to accept—that he might begin his school life as well equipped as his comrades with the luxuries and indulgences which were open to their wealth. And Florian was thrown much more with

Candidus than his brother was ; for the boy happened to be placed in the same house, class-room, and dormitory as himself. The houses at the school were distinguished by the names of different colours, and this (as we have seen) was known as the Blue House. In this class-room and dormitory Trypho too had a place, and Trypho also was anxious to insinuate himself into the good graces of a boy who was evidently of no ordinary stamp.

But Candidus seemed to possess an inherent power, which he could not in the least explain, of knowing whom he might, and whom he might not trust. The secret really lay in a little mirror which Alciphron had given to him, and taught him how to use. This magic mirror had a power of retaining the likenesses of those who had ever been reflected in it ; and it showed them not as they tried to appear, but as they really were. In this mirror the face of the beautiful Florian lost all its best beauty, and assumed a look of slyness, which Candidus disliked ; but as for Trypho, *his* image in the mirror—though he was a good-looking fellow—was positively ugly and repellent. Candidus was always courteous to Trypho, who was much above him in the school, and considerably older than himself. He never treated him with any coldness which could be resented or taken hold of ; but yet Trypho felt that the young new-comer did succeed in rejecting his overtures alike of friendship and of patronage, and did, in some quite indescribable way, keep him at a distance. For a time

he tried to get rid of the impression. But when he wholly failed to secure more than civility from one who was of much humbler rank than his own, and in a far lower position in the school, and also a new comer, his cordiality was changed into something like hatred. He began to stigmatise Candidus as 'a saint' and 'a prig,' to call him by opprobrious or jeering nicknames, and to encourage other boys to mimic and to deride him. This was a serious trial to Candidus; for Trypho, being an influential youth, gave the tone to many, and Candidus was shy and sensitive. The lad's temptation was to be afraid of 'the pointed finger,' when he would have been too brave to shrink from 'the shaken fist.'

And the worst of it was that Florian too, apparently for similar reasons, soon seemed to Candidus to have turned distinctly against him. At first Florian had lavished attentions and kindnesses upon him; but the character of Candidus was too transparent to render it possible for him to conceal his thoughts, or to show anything like affection and confidence when he did not feel them. And these he could not feel when he looked from Florian himself to his reflection in the magic mirror. He knew that he owed to Duke Altus all the advantages, present and prospective, of his education at the great Porphyrian school; and Florian might naturally have expected that a boy so deeply indebted to his father, and the son of one of the Duke's dependents, would show some deference to him. Yet, so far from returning the regard which Florian really

felt, and so far from exhibiting any sign of gratitude or affection, Candidus—whose face always brightened when Ardens spoke to him, although Ardens did not make half so much of him—seemed unable to respond with any warmth to the caressing and patronising kindness of Florian. Without a single overt act or word, Candidus left on the mind of Florian the impression that the new boy distrusted and held aloof from him.

But what puzzled them a little was that Candidus never seemed to have the same shrinking from Facilis. The reason was that though in the mirror the face of Facilis was a little dim and blurred, yet it showed nothing which caused the least distrust in the new boy's mind.

It was a sad truth that both Trypho and Florian, far more than Facilis, and not in mere weakness, but from arrant and arrogant wilfulness, had become renegades from those laws which alone can make life happy or noble. They disowned their duties to their true Lord and King. They felt in their hearts the brand of servitude to the basilisk. However much they might brazen it out among their companions, and however much they might profess to boast of their freedom, they knew that their bondage was a miserable thing. This secret disquietude, together with the venomous atmosphere caused by the proximity of the crowned serpent, was constantly impelling them to save any fragment of their own self-respect by entangling as many others as they could into similar apostasy. It

would have been some consolation to them, in the consciousness of their own fall, if they could have made such a boy as Candidus a traitor to all that is best. The destiny of Candidus had thrown him into the midst of the bad set of boys, who wore the badge of Elyon's enemy; and they were determined, if they could, to make him like themselves, if not by willing acceptance of their influence, then by cruelty and force. And outside this set of bad boys no one knew of this, for to be 'a sneak' or 'a tell-tale' was to violate all the Ten Commandments of their schoolboy morality. It was branded among them with such disgrace, and enforced by the threat of penalties so serious, that a boy would bear almost any extremes of anguish rather than seek deliverance by revealing his sufferings to others.

So poor little Candidus fell on evil days and evil tongues, long before he was old enough to understand that there may be a beatitude in malediction. Of course the boys of his house and dormitory were supposed to know him best. If they chose to cut him, to sneer at him, to leave him out of their games and gatherings, and to stigmatise him as 'a low-born cad' and 'a surly conceited puppy'—other boys in the school, fancying that there must be some ground for this bad opinion, and not being thrown enough into the lad's company to understand him aright, took little or no notice of him, and regarded him as a failure. In consequence of this the boy became so disheartened that all his natural charm

of character was overshadowed. His face, once so bright, began to wear an expression of weary sadness. Even the energy with which he would, under more favourable conditions, have shown his intellectual ability was so far damped that the masters also—though they saw how faithfully he tried to do his duty, were disappointed of their original hope that they would find in him one of the most promising of their pupils.

Alone, and almost friendless, yet steadfast in his resolution that nothing should induce him to do anything but show his abhorrence for the basilisk and all his ways, Candidus bitterly rued the ambitious hopes which had led his father to accept the offer of Duke Altus. At last he became so unendurably miserable that he wrote home and entreated his father, at all costs, to take him away. At home he had met with care, and moral guidance, and tender love; there everything around him was sweet and wholesome and pure; but here at school he was in a new and evil world. He would not tell, even to his father, all the sources of his misery and disquietude, but he begged him, by the love he bore him, to remove him from school at once.

The father of Candidus, to whom his boy was as the apple of his eye, was pained by this unexpected letter, and took it to his patron for advice. But the Duke was disposed to make light of it.

‘Your boy,’ he said, ‘is a little homesick, that is all. He will soon get over it. I knew an exactly similar

case, where the father simply wrote back to encourage and cheer up his son, and in a short time the boy became a passionately enthusiastic supporter of the school, from which he had once implored his father to take him away.'

The father accepted the advice of his kind-hearted landlord, and wrote a very loving letter to his son whose unhappiness had made his heart bleed. At the same time the Duke himself wrote a letter to Ardens asking him to find out, if he could, what made Candidus so miserable, and whether his hatred of the school was due to any fault of his own.

So, one holiday afternoon, when all the boys were streaming out to their games, Ardens purposely stayed behind to look for Candidus. He saw that he had not gone up to the playing fields with the rest of his house. This showed him that there was something wrong, and that his poor little friend was being practically boycotted by his companions. But knowing that the Blue House did not bear the best reputation, Ardens looked on the isolation of his young *protégé* rather as a testimony to his merits than as a sign that there was any fault in his character.

As he expected, he found Candidus wandering alone by the edge of the forest, looking unspeakably sad, longing for home, indignant at the injustice with which he was treated. His heart was beginning to fail him at the soreness of the battle which he was called upon to fight in behalf of righteousness and allegiance to all that he knew to be best.

Ardens came up to him almost unperceived, and said, 'All alone, Candidus? Why don't you go up to the games with the rest? You must not mope like this.'

'I wish they would let me join in the games, Ardens,' he said.

'Why won't they let you?'

'They don't like me,' said Candidus, looking on the ground.

'Why?'

He raised his eyes and looked at Ardens, and even in that honest glance Ardens saw that Candidus, at any rate, had nothing for which to blush.

'I see,' said Ardens; 'I don't want you to tell tales out of school! But,' he added, 'come up to the field with me, Candidus; I will bowl to you, and to-day, at any rate, you shall have some good exercise.'

Candidus turned to him with a look of deep gratitude, for at that moment he caught a glimpse of him in his mirror, and in the magic crystal the face of Ardens was as the face of an angel.

Ardens took him kindly by the arm; and for many weeks Candidus—ever since Trypho and Florian began to turn their backs on him and discountenance him—had been so lonely and so wretched, that even the little word of sympathy and touch of kindness moved his burdened heart, and, unable to help it, he turned his face away to hide his tears.

Ardens was hardly less moved, and was at the same time deeply indignant to think that his young school-

fellow should have been so unjustly treated. He put his arm round the shoulder of Candidus, and was walking with him towards the playing field, when he heard a loud and insulting

‘ Ahem ! ’

Ardens turned round angrily to the speaker, and saw Trypho with several younger boys about him, each of whom had a broad grin on his face.

‘ What do you mean by saying “ Ahem ! ” ? ’ he asked, confronting Trypho.

‘ I shall say “ Ahem ! ” as much as ever I choose,’ answered Trypho sardonically, while his little group of admirers giggled their applause.

Ardens was conscious of the hot surge of passion which mounted to his forehead and seemed to dilate his whole frame. He felt madly inclined to spring into the midst of the group, scatter them in every direction, fling some of them to the ground, and then assault Trypho with all his force. His enemy the leopard, always watchful for his opportunity, was again crouched for a spring upon him ; but at the moment his arm pressed against the sword hidden under his robe, and, grasping the cross hilt, he collected and controlled himself. Instead of rushing at Trypho he forced himself into calmness, merely shrugged his shoulders, and turned his back on him.

‘ Come along, Candidus,’ he said ; ‘ never mind these cads.’

They went together to the fields, and for once Candidus had a good, manly, healthy game, and there

dawned in his heart once more a little natural happiness. But Ardens felt most uneasy about him, and determined to speak to Florian, of whom, in spite of his wish, he had seen very little since the term began.

‘Florian,’ he said, ‘I am terribly sorry for poor little Candidus. Father more or less entrusted him to our charge. Why do you fellows all cut him? Why are you all so unkind and so unjust to him?’

‘He is nothing to me,’ said Florian coldly. ‘I wanted to notice him, and be kind to him, but his highness is such a conceited little prig that it is impossible to get on with him.’

‘Conceited? A prig?’ said Ardens. ‘I never saw a more modest and charming little fellow.’

‘He may do for the saints among whom you move,’ said Florian with assumed contempt. ‘He does not suit us.’

‘So much the worse for you,’ said Ardens. ‘I wish to heaven I could get him out of your detestable house. It is a long way the worst house in the school. I believe the whole lot of you are thoroughly bad fellows.’

‘Mind your own business,’ answered Florian in as cutting a tone as he dared assume. ‘Hallo, Trypho!’ he shouted, as he saw his friend in the distance, ‘come and deliver me from the lectures of my sweet-tempered and immaculate brother.’

Ardens was too much grieved to be angry; but on the days that followed, he kept an eye on Candidus, and feared from what he saw that things were getting

worse and worse. One day he heard a cry from one of the class-rooms as he passed, and, recognising the voice of his young friend, violated all schoolboy etiquette by going straight into the room, though it did not belong to his own house. The sight he saw filled him with rage. At the end of the room stood Candidus by himself; a few yards from him were a dozen or more boys, mostly older than he was—and among them were Trypho's special admirers, Rhodon, Cyprius, and Thallus—who were amusing themselves by 'baiting' him. The 'baiting' consisted in calling him nicknames, mimicking his every look and his slightest movement, making insulting noises and gestures, and flinging at him books, balls, and whatever came nearest to hand. Even amid surroundings so wretched the persecuted boy maintained something of his natural dignity. Ardens could not help noticing to himself that all the nobleness was with Candidus, and that it was the group of his tormentors who looked disreputable and even abject.

But Ardens felt most thoroughly ashamed of the Porphyrian boys who had sunk so low as to behave with such cruel baseness to a new comer, and to one so blameless as his little friend.

'Stop that, you unspeakable curs!' he said.

The boys stared at him in amazement. Here was a boy who did not belong to their house, and yet had the audacity to come uninvited into their class-room, and to interfere with their proceedings, and to speak to them like that! They looked threateningly at Ardens, but he stood there so contemptuous and so determined,

evidently so entirely undismayed by their numbers, that they thought discretion the better part of valour. One of them, however—Trypho's chief supporter, Thallus—ventured to say :

‘ You be —— ! Who are you ? ’ And to show his defiance he flung another book at Candidus.

Instantly Ardens strode up to him and slapped him in the face. It was a good hard buffet, and made him wince and whimper. The others began to hoot at Ardens, and Cyprius shouted :

‘ You beastly coward ! ’

‘ Coward,’ answered Ardens scornfully. ‘ You are a dozen and I am one. It is you who are the cowards.’

‘ You would not dare to hector like this if Trypho were here,’ said Cyprius.

‘ Wouldn't I ? ’ said Ardens. ‘ Go and call him ! I shall stay here, in spite of you all, till he comes, and if one of you touches Candidus again, he shall get worse than the last bully got.’

Rhodon and Cyprius ran out and called Trypho, who came striding in, and was in a towering passion.

‘ Get out of this ! ’ he said to Ardens. ‘ What right have you to come sneaking and spying into our classroom ? ’

Ardens sternly resolved to keep his temper, so he answered quite calmly, ‘ I am neither sneaking nor spying. As I was accidentally passing, I heard Candidus cry out, and I came in to save him from being bullied.’

‘ It is no affair of yours.’

'It *is* an affair of mine. He is a friend of mine, and of my father's; and you'—he suppressed the contemptuous words which sprang to his lips—'you are making him wretched because he is a better fellow than yourself.'

'No sermons here!' said Trypho, strong in the number of his adherents. 'If you don't get out of this at once, you shall be kicked out.'

'Kicked out?' said Ardens scornfully. 'I should like to see any three of you do it.'

Trypho was both older and bigger than Ardens, and said, 'I will turn you out myself.'

'Try it!'

Trypho struck him, and, the moment after, a hard fight began between them. Ardens got some heavy blows, but he felt thrice armed in the justice of his cause. Indignation against Trypho, in whom he recognised the source of the worst influences on his brother's life, seemed to inspire him with unwonted strength, and after a time it became clear that his adversary could not hold out much longer against so hardy and plucky an antagonist. After a few rounds he knocked Trypho down, but thereupon the rest set upon him, pinioned him, and by sheer force thrust him out of the room. At the door he met Florian.

'He's been sneaking, and spying, and hectoring here,' said Thallus in answer to Florian's astonished look.

'It's a lie, Florian,' said Ardens.

'It isn't,' shouted Trypho from inside the room.

‘Haven’t you had enough yet, Trypho?’ said Ardens with contempt. ‘Would you like to fight me again, or shall I come and give you a second thrashing?’

Florian did not like this discomfiture of his house and of his coadjutor.

‘Anyhow, you had no business here,’ he said to his brother.

‘I disdain to jangle about it,’ said Ardens; ‘but Candidus at least shall be saved from this detestable set of yours, if I can do anything.’ And so saying he strode away; and all the Caeruleans could not help feeling that, physically no less than morally, he had got much the best of it.

XII

- . Our acts our angels are—or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

FLETCHER.

AND now things might at once have become worse than ever for Candidus, but the house for its own reasons made it a point of honour to keep its own secrets. No law, as I have said, was more strenuously inculcated and insisted on among all new comers than that they should keep themselves to themselves, make the house-life the first consideration, and never talk about its affairs or its doings to boys in other houses. It was for this reason that the boys tried always to mould and assimilate every new comer. They very rarely

failed to do this. The large majority of Porphyrian boys—not all, thank heaven!—like the chameleon, assumed their colour from their immediate surroundings. Years had passed since any boy had shown himself sufficiently strong and resolute to follow his own secret sense of duty, to do right and shame the devil. The Caeruleans were provoked and thwarted by the uncompromising resistance of Candidus to their evil tone of morals, and by his undisguised horror of their lord the basilisk. Since violence had failed to subdue his spirit, they once more tried an insidious kindness. They no longer cut him. They spoke cordially to him, they asked him to join in their games, in which he soon began to distinguish himself: but neither they nor their leaders relinquished the intention of bringing him into line with the bad traditions of the house; and in that matter they felt that they gained no ground.

In spite alike of cruel persecution and of treacherous cordiality, Candidus fought the better fight, and maintained singly the course of rectitude:

Amid innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his faith, his love.

Trypho was specially alarmed and indignant, and spoke to Florian, who, having hardened his heart, had made himself the chief supporter of his bad friend. Florian was further stimulated by a sort of personal pique that Candidus should show himself braver and

better than he himself had been. He sought out Candidus and said, 'You are getting on a little better with the fellows, aren't you, Candidus?'

'Yes, Florian.'

'And more ready to fall into our ways?'

Candidus kicked the turf with his foot, looked down, and said nothing.

'Why not?' asked Florian.

'They are always talking to me about the basilisk; I hate the reptile; he is the enemy of Elyon.'

'Pooh!' said Florian, 'there isn't the least reason to be so squeamish. The basilisk will do you no harm, any more than it has done me.'

Candidus lifted up his bright innocent eyes, and in their transparent clearness Florian read the question which the boy had not spoken: 'Has it done you no harm, Florian?'

'Don't be impudent,' he said fretfully, 'or I'll thrash you.'

'What?' asked Candidus in surprise; 'I said nothing.'

'No! but you thought something.'

'Are not my thoughts to be my own?'

'I hate you, Candidus, I fairly hate you,' exclaimed Florian with petulant wrath, not knowing whether in his heart he did not really love and admire him, or whether he did indeed detest him.

'I am sorry, Florian, if you do. But I cannot help your hating me. I have done nothing to make you hate me. Have you tried to do me no harm? Are

you not trying to harm me now? Would you make me as—as so many are—and do you want the Evil One to leave his brand on me as he has on ’—he was going to say ‘on you,’ but he stopped short.

Florian stamped his foot, struck Candidus a contemptuous blow, and left him with the words, ‘You are a hopeless little hypocrite, and I detest you, and I wish you’d never come to bother us and lecture us here. We were far happier without you, and got on far better.’

XIII

Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis.—Ps. xc. 13.

He who hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
 Cannot confound, or doubt Him, or defy;
 Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
 Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

F. MYERS, *St. Paul.*

FLORIAN told Trypho that he had failed, and Trypho said, ‘But we won’t fail; one weak boy sha’n’t beat us. He shall be subdued this very night.’

That afternoon, Florian, Trypho, and the other leaders of the house announced that as the master was going to be absent from home they would have a rough extempore feast in the big dormitory. It was the one in which Candidus slept.

The master of the house was a man entirely unsuited to his position, who did not understand the nature of boys, nor take any adequate care of their moral welfare. He neglected them, and left them to

themselves. The servants were a bad corrupt lot, bribed to silence and connivance. They were in the power of the boys, and the boys in their power. The Caeruleans held their feast that night secure from any disturbance, and many boys drank much more wine than was good for them. They purposely turned their talk upon the subject of the basilisk and his splendours, and at last Trypho proposed a toast to 'our lord the basilisk,' which all were to drink standing.

Candidus remained seated.

'Stand, or it shall be the worse for you,' said several boys.

Still he would not move; and when the rest had drunk the toast, Trypho, seizing him, said, 'This must and shall end. Now, for the last time, will you be like the rest of us, and drink, or——?'

'I will not drink,' answered Candidus in a low voice and very quietly.

'You shall,' said Trypho. 'Seize him!'

Several boys seized him, held him down, violently forced his mouth open, and poured the wine down his throat.

'Now, will you wear the badge as we all do?'

'Never!' said Candidus indignantly. 'I loathe, I abhor the monster. I am Elyon's son, and to the best of my power I will do nothing which would degrade me and offend him.'

The words 'degrade me' stung Florian to the quick, and made him feel beside himself.

'Degrade you?' he said with a sneer; 'it would not

take much to degrade you. You are a mere clodhopper, the son of a small farmer, and it is my father who pays for your school expenses.'

The moment he had blurted out this contemptible taunt, Florian felt the disgrace of having sunk so low as to utter it, and his cheek burned when Candidus turned on him his quiet gaze, though he said nothing. But Facilis did pluck up courage to say something.

'O Florian,' he whispered, 'for shame! you ought not to have said that.'

'I know I ought not,' said Florian peevishly, 'but that creeping humbug transports me out of myself with his saintly airs.'

'Do you really think him a humbug, Florian? It might have been better for you and for me if we had been as good and true as he has shown himself to be.'

'Hang him!' said Florian; 'I hate him.'

But the boys again seized Candidus and held him fast. Resistance was of course hopeless against so many, all of whom were older and stronger than himself. Trypho and Florian tied and twisted round his neck a strong gilded cord to which was attached the green and gleaming—but to Candidus inconceivably detestable—image of the demon serpent.

While this was being done the others were roaring with laughter; especially when Candidus, the moment that his hands were free, tore and tugged at the detestable symbol, but was unable to break it from his neck, and at last, overcome by the intensity of his feelings, grew very pale, and hid his face in his hands.

A few of the Caeruleans began to sympathise with him, and wished that they had once shown the same noble courage. Facilis, deeply pitying him, though he was too weak openly to take his part, secretly pressed his hand, and gave him an open knife. With this Candidus cut the cord, and flung the badge indignantly in Trypho's face. The sharp edge of it cut his cheek. Transported to fury, Trypho seized him, thrashed him unmercifully, and ordered the rest to make him run the gauntlet between two rows of them, and to kick him, and beat him with their fists and tightly knotted handkerchiefs, and even with canes and sticks as he ran.

Florian had fallen into such complete degradation that he could take part in such a scene and not interfere! Nay, more—furious with shame at his own unworthiness—he himself struck the boy hard with a knotted handkerchief.

Very few abstained from having a share in this cruelty. Facilis was one of them. He stood there with his arms folded, a picture of sadness. But, alas! he looked on and said nothing.

Bruised, beaten, trembling, but still unsubdued, Candidus sat down on the edge of one of the beds, and Trypho held a hurried whispered conversation with the other leaders. They determined to take the desperate step of invoking the presence of the basilisk himself, that so he might strike into Candidus the mortal poison of his glance.

To Facilis this seemed so utterly inexcusable that he

ventured, though timidly, to raise his voice against it. But his opposition was only met by scorn and laughter.

‘Make a square round this obstinate young cad,’ said Trypho. ‘Now, lads, look out, for some one will be here directly.’

Then they secretly invoked the baleful demon. The air became thick as with intoxicating and deadly perfume, and suddenly out of a lurid mist they saw flashes as of golden scales, until the evil creature was in the midst of them, gliding up to Candidus, hissing, rearing its crested head, transfixing him with the glance of its burning eyes.

But, to the amazement of all, so far from being infected by the demon’s magic spell, or in the least frightened by its menacing paws and dragon glare, the mere presence of the creature seemed to cause Candidus to summon the whole strength of his resolution. He stood absolutely unmoved. No tremor passed through him. His countenance resumed its natural hue. He cast one glance upwards, folded his hands together, and then, confronting the basilisk with dauntless mien, said with a voice which rang with scorn :

‘Hateful fiend, in Elyon’s name I bid thee avaunt !’

And lo ! no sooner were the words uttered than a yell was heard, and the creature vanished in flame and smoke, defeated by a child, leaving a sense of shame and horror in the hearts of all its helpless votaries.

In the confusion which ensued, two things happened.

First, Candidus, worn out by physical pain—for he had been severely maltreated—and by the stress of intense



‘IN ELYON’S NAME I BID THEE AVAUNT!’

feeling, and by the unwonted strangeness of what had occurred, fainted away. He would have fallen on the

floor if Facilis had not caught him in his arms, and gently laid him on his own bed.

Next, the door was flung open, and—unobserved amid the tumult—in strode, not the master of the House, but the President of the School. He was a man of stern aspect, though of a kind heart, whose high authority was both respected and feared. Seeing lights shining so late at night in the large dormitory, and hearing a sound of many voices, as he passed through the garden under the window, he felt sure that there were some riotous proceedings on foot among the boys, and had come in person to see what had occurred.

He was in the midst of the group of excited boys before they noticed him. When they saw him a dead hush fell suddenly upon the scene.

‘What is the meaning of this disgraceful disorder at forbidden hours?’

No one answered.

Then he caught sight of Candidus lying on his bed, pale as death. He looked with the deepest pity on his pallid features.

‘What is the matter with that poor little fellow?’ he asked.

‘He has fainted, sir,’ said Rhodon timidly.

‘Why has he fainted? what have you been doing to him? All this must be inquired into. There is something very wrong here. I have always had my doubts about the conduct and character of you boys in this house.’

He looked round him, and as his eye fell on each, they grew confused and wore a guilty aspect. They could not look him in the face.

‘Ha! I see you have been holding a surreptitious feast, and drinking wine. But—what is that on the floor? Trypho, pick it up and bring it to me.’

He pointed to the badge of the basilisk which Candidus had flung away. Trypho pretended not to see it while he tried to shove it away with his foot.

‘Bring it here!’ thundered the President. ‘How dare you attempt to disobey?’

With sheepish reluctance the boy brought it. The master looked at it with disgust, noticed that the sharp edge was tinged with blood, and then glanced at the cut upon Trypho’s cheek. At last, with horror, it flashed upon him what it was.

‘Is this yours?—this hateful sign of apostasy?’

‘No!’ said Trypho. But, like the rest of the boys, he had thrown off his upper garment, and was unaware that the badge round his neck was partially exposed.

‘Then what is this?’ said the President, plucking it from the boy’s neck. ‘Oh, shame on you, shame, shame! I little thought that boys at the great Porphyrian school could have sunk so low as to wear the badge of the basilisk. What, and you too, Florian? And you, Facilis?’ As he spoke he seized the badge round the neck of each of them and tore it away. ‘Oh, shame! shame! To your beds, you renegades,’ and, seizing a rod, he laid it so vigorously on the

backs of one after another, that some of the wretched offenders actually howled as they fled.

Grieved beyond expression at what he had discovered, he spoke a few words of sternest warning, and then turned to Candidus. The poor boy lay half conscious, and between his moans he was speaking deliriously. The President observed with indignation that he was bruised all over. His heart ached to think that this boy, so nobly attractive, should have been subjected to such treatment. But his indignation became yet more poignant when he caught the purpose of the broken sentences which he spoke in his delirium.

The next morning he opened a most searching inquiry which revealed to him a state of things such as he had never suspected. Thallus, Rhodon, Cyprius, and many other boys were severely flogged, and were only kept at the school with greatly curtailed privileges, on the promise of penitence and amendment. Others received very stern warnings that at the first shadow of complaint against them they would be ignominiously dismissed, and for months afterwards they were deemed unworthy of confidence or liberty. But the three leaders, Trypho, Florian, and Facilis, were expelled from the school with disgrace, for it was judged that they had violated the trust reposed in them as senior boys and had been dishonourable promoters of the disobedience and misconduct which they ought to have been the first to suppress to the utmost of their power. Trypho, when he went, received no pity at all. Even the Caeruleans, whose ringleader he had long been, were glad to see him

go. For Florian, some felt very sorry, remembering what he had been when first he came among them ; but he had long forfeited the respect of the most right-minded boys. It was poor Facilis whose expulsion awoke the most undisguised sympathy. He was the least guilty of the three, and he felt his position the most acutely. He was a fatherless boy, but his mother was living. He was the idol of her life. However deep might be his faults and errors, to her at least he had always been most loyal and most loving. He feared that his return in disgrace would break her heart. The other two, as they said their farewells, tried to assume an almost swaggering tone of indifference, which sat particularly ill on Florian and pained the faithful heart of his brother. Facilis did not even attempt to seem unmoved. He was very silent. Many boys wrung his hand affectionately, and tried to cheer him with the hope of better things hereafter. Among them was Ardens, whose heart ached for him, and little Candidus, who also pressed his hand and whispered a few words of affection and cheer. Their kindly sympathy touched him to the very depths of his soul. Sadly and silently he returned the grasp of their hands ; he dared not speak, lest he should break down ; when he leant back his head in the carriage which bore him away, the tears were coursing each other fast down his cheeks.

‘Don’t cry as if you were a great baby,’ said Trypho fiercely.

‘I have a mother whose heart will break when I

see her,' said Facilis, turning his back on him. 'And as for you, I wish I had never seen you.'

'Never mind,' said Florian, who sincerely pitied him. 'We shall think nothing of it a year hence.'

'Ah! Florian,' said Facilis, 'I am grieved for you as well as for myself.'

The three boys went home.

The father and mother of Trypho were people of wealth and fashion, who did not trouble themselves greatly about their son's morals so long as he did not fall short of their conventional estimate of a gentleman. His expulsion made no great difference to him. He was very soon a society-man.

When Facilis came back, his weeping mother folded him in her arms, pressed him to her heart. She forgave him, she did not upbraid. He tried to comfort her, but the disgrace and anguish weighed upon her spirits. She had not strength to fight against them. In vain he strove to cheer, to comfort her. After struggling on for a month or two she died, and Facilis, as he flung himself upon her grave, longed that he too had been called to die with her. She was the last link between him and resolute amendment. Heart-broken with sorrow and hopeless remorse, he drifted on his sad career.

XIV

Adhaesit pavimento anima mea.—Ps. cxix. 25.

IT is impossible to express the intense shame and anguish of Duke Altus, when his younger son—his favourite, the beautiful boy of whom he had been so proud—came home in deep disgrace, as one who had notoriously tampered with the basilisk, and had thus prematurely blighted the hopes which his father had entertained of his future career.

The Duke was a man of a disposition unusually proud and acutely sensitive—a man with such ‘sensitivity of honour’ that ‘he felt a stain like a wound.’ What had happened could not be hushed up. Boys from almost every noble family in Porphyria were at the Gate School, and as Altus was among the noblest peers in the land, the stain which had fallen on the name of his son would be talked of, or at least whispered, throughout the whole country, and would live for many a year upon the lips of scandal. He groaned to think of it. When Florian came back in the middle of term, he at first refused even to see him. He shut himself up in his room, and brooded on the blight which had withered his passionate affection for his son, and the blot which had fallen upon his hitherto stainless escutcheon. All day long he fed on these desolating thoughts, and lay sleepless through the night. Hearing of his despair, Alciphron, the good old

Mage, came to the castle, and insisted on seeing him. He was moved to the deepest compassion by his haggard look, and tried to comfort his sad friend with the tenderest consolations. 'Florian is young,' he said; 'he has had a tremendous lesson. There is still time for him to regain lost ground, and to grow up a good and useful man.'

'Yes,' said Altus bitterly. 'But this shame of his youth will never be forgotten. This most wretched boy has made his life like corn blasted before it is grown up.'

'Send for him, Duke,' said Alciphron; 'expostulate, but still be gentle with him. Do we not all need to be forgiven?'

'I cannot see him,' said Altus, 'it would break my heart. The boy's face—for I saw him pass under my window—now looks to me as hateful as it once was lovely. Its expression is quite changed. I will make an effort to resume my ordinary life. Perhaps a little later on I may conquer the heart-breaking repugnance with which he now inspires me. Meanwhile, will not you take him in hand?'

'I will do what little I can,' he said.

Alciphron sought for Florian, but was shocked to find how deeply he had degenerated even in appearance. The old man could do nothing with him. He was sullen and silent, and professed to be angry with his father for making such a fuss about nothing. The Mage left him with a very heavy heart, full of immense forebodings.

Then followed a grievous tragedy. The Duke felt the necessity for shaking off the nightmare of misery which oppressed him, and he ordered his horse that he might hunt wild boars in the forest. But even while he hunted, the recollections which he felt to be unspeakable for sadness overwhelmed him. Oblivious of everything, he suddenly, and without being conscious of it, drove his spurs deep into the sides of his horse. Wholly unaccustomed to such treatment, the noble steed sprang into the air, and then started off at a wild gallop. Before Altus could recover the mastery or secure his seat, the horse suddenly swerved into a side path of the forest and the head of Altus was dashed with violence against the trunk of a great oak. He was hurled to the ground, and, as he lay there, the hoof of the flying and frightened steed kicked him in the side. When his friends and attendants came to rescue him he was dying. His thoughts turned upon his two boys. He blessed Ardens, but his last words were, 'My Florian, whom I loved so tenderly—Florian expelled from school in disgrace—oh, misery!' While they were carrying him home amid the wailing of the many who deeply loved him, the great Duke died.

Ardens and Florian walked side by side as chief mourners in the splendid obsequies. Ardens succeeded his father in the dukedom and all its wealth, being placed under the guardianship of Alciphron and of an

uncle until he should be of age. We need not follow his fortunes. He returned to school for a year, then travelled in Porphyria; and, when he was old enough, assumed the management of his wide domains, and took a part in the government of his country. He always looked up to Alciphron as his guide, philosopher and friend. Following his wise and gentle counsels he struggled victoriously with his proud, imperious, violent temper as he had done in his boyhood, until his enemy the leopard was subdued into a slave. He grew up to be a great and honoured ruler, and from the first took a firm stand on the marble threshold of a noble manhood, prosperous and successful in most respects, but deeply troubled by one irreparable misfortune—the disgrace and ruin of his brother Florian.

XV

He that allows himself in any sin, or allows himself an unnatural dalliance with any vice, does nothing else in reality than entertain an incubus demon.—J. SMITH, *Discourse of the Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion*.

FOR Florian went, alas! from bad to worse, and from worse to worst. Sullen, humiliated, his vanity stabbed to the heart, sent to foreign countries to complete his education, and there sinking into even viler vices than before, he came back meaning to enjoy to the full the patrimony left him by his father out of his great wealth. But he illustrated the force of the old question, ‘Whom

have you ever seen content with a single sin?' Dissolute as he had now become in heart and conversation, his very features stamped with the mark of the basilisk and defaced with the taint of his evil life, he added drunkenness and gambling to his other iniquities. The latter perniciously ruinous vices he pursued with almost frantic eagerness, for the other excitements which alone the basilisk could offer him had already begun to pall. He needed something to make him forget for what a nothing less than nothing he had sold and sacrificed what might have been the glory of his life. But as his betting and gambling became more and more recklessly mad, in that proportion the wretched young man was more and more overwhelmed with losses. Sometimes, in the feverish fret of this passion he would stake a year's income on a single game, and lose it. At first, when he began to be reduced to utter distress, he used to appeal to his grieved but pitying brother, Duke Ardens. But at last the Duke had to write and say to Florian that, while he would help him to the half of his princely fortune in any honourable life, he could not advance him one coin more, if it was only to be squandered in vice and folly. Florian was senseless enough to resent what he stigmatised as 'dictation.' He wrote an insulting letter to Ardens, refusing ever to speak to him again, repudiating all feeling of brotherhood towards him, and denouncing him as a 'curmudgeon, a humbug and a skinflint,' who did not care for his nearest relation, nor indeed for any human being except his proud self.

To help such a one, while he continued to be such, was hopeless; Ardens was forced to leave him to his own devices.

In the shipwreck of his credit and his character all his nominal friends had deserted him. Trypho, now a leader of fashion among the most corrupt of the gilded youths, had cut him dead as soon as he sank to penury, and could only wear a dingy robe. Trypho persuaded himself that if Florian had put himself more under his guidance as a man of the world, the badge of the basilisk would never have eaten so deeply into his flesh.

But Florian had, as Trypho expressed it, played his cards badly, and made an utter fool of himself. He had made his bed, and would have to lie on it.

The only schoolfellow whom Florian ever saw in these days, in which he had sunk into the bottomless pit of humiliation, was poor Facilis. Facilis, after the death of his mother, never held up his head. He secretly accused himself of being her murderer. He had neither strength nor resolution to take up arms against the sea of wretchedness which now came over him in flood. Of what use was it to struggle? What could he do worse than he had done in having, by his disgrace, hastened the end of the mother whom he loved more than all the world beside? He was left very badly off, for his mother had a pension which died with her, but which she had freely spent in doing her best to furnish him with the education which would fit him to earn his own living, and to make his way in the world. The soft nature of Facilis lacked

the nerve and strenuousness which, in his altered circumstances, could alone have enabled him to succeed. He had no energy to struggle. He had no relatives able to help him, and he could find no opening for which he was fitted. He did not sink into a criminal, but, in sheer despair, he fell lower and lower in the social scale. Weakness of character continued to be his curse. Any acute scoundrel could twist him round his fingers. Gradually he became the helpless dupe and prey, though in no sense the colleague, of a gang of villains who had managed to get hold of him in his lowest misery, and from whom he strove in vain to set himself free. With this hideous confederacy of scoundrels, Florian, in his misery, had also become even more fatally entangled. They had him completely in their power. They could hold a rope round his neck. For at one despairing moment of anguish, when his fortunes had sunk to the nadir, they had induced Florian to forge his brother's name, and Facilis had some cognisance of the crime, which had not yet been detected, but which these blackmailers constantly threatened to reveal.

It was through them, and his helplessness in their evil hands, that the final crisis came, over which I shall hurry with all possible speed.

Both Florian and Facilis had now fallen into such total ruin as to have become denizens of a common lodging house in one of the great Porphyrian cities. They had left themselves no other refuge. The only home now open to them was situated in one of those

regions into which is swept the worst coagulated scum of human misery and vileness. The dirt, the ugliness, the blackguardism around them were unutterably nauseous to them both, but especially to Florian, who had once lived in king's houses, a beautiful and noble boy. Yet what deliverance was possible to one who, like himself, had sunk among the rags and swine? One day the great painter who had painted him when he was a boy because of his consummate beauty, had been directed to visit the low and squalid alley in which Florian now lived, in search of some model who would illustrate the uttermost depths of human misery. He had chosen Florian, wholly ignorant who he was, or that he had ever seen him before. The sum which he paid him to sit as his model was now an object of importance to the thrice-degraded victim of the basilisk. The painter's subject was a miserable wretch, struggling in the crushing folds of a serpent, into whose cheek the serpent had already fixed his fangs. When the picture was nearly finished, Florian, in desperation, said, 'Do you not recognise me?'

'Recognise you, my poor youth?' said the painter in surprise; 'I never saw you before.'

'Nay, but you have seen me before, and, what is more, you have painted me.'

'Painted you? Impossible!'

'Look at me again.'

A faint gleam of recollection, which he could not identify, seemed to pass through the painter's mind; but he could only shake his head.

Then Florian rose impatiently, and, taking his stand beside a replica of the picture which ten years before had enjoyed a boundless popularity—the picture in which, as a boy, he had figured as an ideal of ‘Happy Boyhood’—he asked, ‘Am I so changed?’

Then, indeed, the painter caught the resemblance, and could not suppress a cry of amazement.

‘You, the young Lord Florian?’ he exclaimed. ‘O poor, poor fellow! How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!’

He gave Florian ten times the sum for which he had hired him as a model. But of what use was it? Before a month was over the young man, after a persistent run of what he called ‘ill luck,’ was absolutely penniless, and so was Facilis. Neither of them seemed to have a single resource left them in all the world.

Then, when they felt the actual gnawings of hunger, the gang of villains with whom they had got mixed up ventured to hint at a desperate and most dangerous expedient.

‘Here are you starving, Florian,’ they said; ‘your brother, Duke Ardens, who hates you, is ashamed of you, and has disowned you, is rolling in wealth.’

‘What then? I would much rather starve to death than ask him for any more money. He would not give it me—curse him—if I did.’

‘He need not give it you. You have a sort of right to some of it at least.’

Florian said nothing.

‘Why should you not help yourself and us to some of those treasures?’

‘What? rob the house of my own brother?’ said Florian with horror. ‘I would rather starve by inches.’

‘It is not half so bad as forgery,’ said the scoundrel significantly.

‘I would rather starve by inches,’ repeated Florian with dogged misery.

‘It is not a mere matter of starving. You are, as all the world knows, a votary of the basilisk.’

‘Curse the basilisk!’ said Florian fiercely. ‘Oh! oh!’ he cried, for just then it seemed to him as if the monster had struck him and hissed out, ‘Slave, do you vilify your lord?’

‘The castle abounds,’ continued the leader of the gang, ‘in treasures of gold and silver. The Duke scarcely ever sees them, or uses them; they only come out at some state banquet, once in five years. He would not miss them in the least. Don’t call it robbery. You have a sort of right to some of them at any rate. Even one gold cup or plate might save you from dying of hunger, and would get you enough money to escape from this hell; and perhaps,’ he added, with a sardonic laugh, ‘to begin a new life.’

‘Don’t listen to the fellow, Florian,’ exclaimed Facilis, wringing his thin and wasted hands. ‘And never mind his sneer about beginning again. It may yet be possible. It is never too late to mend. And oh! if one had but a chance! If one had but a chance!’

Florian listened in speechless gloom. 'A new life!' he murmured in hollow tones. 'What folly! There may be hope for you, Facilis; there is none for me.'

'What hope is there for either of us?' said Facilis, with a despairing wave of his hand. 'Nothing could be worse, nothing half so bad as this.'

'Then shall I do what they suggest? It would be quite easy. I know the castle well; I know where the keys are kept. We are starving; we have no chance; we can't sink lower; we might escape.'

'Far better die on the spot,' said Facilis.

'All very well,' sneered the captain of the black gang. 'But it isn't a question of dying, you poor Facilis. We have this fellow in our power, and you too. It is a question of deliverance or of public hanging, and a name blasted for ever.'

Florian groaned aloud.

'Listen,' continued the man: 'all we ask you to do is to guide us about the castle. Let us carry off a little of the gold plate, and we pledge ourselves, by all the gods and all the devils, to destroy all that gives us a hold on both of you, and to let you leave the country together with enough to live on. We will all swear it. Now I shall leave you to talk it over with Facilis.'

When the wretch had gone there was silence, till at last Florian, who had been sitting with his head on the table, said, 'I met that execrable Trypho to-day, Facilis. He knew me quite well; gave me a con-

tumelious stare, and cut me dead. Ah, Facilis, when first I went to the Gate School, a happy, innocent boy, the 'darling and idol of my father'—he paused, and could not go on—'it was Trypho who flattered me, and could not make too much of me. And now——'

'It was the same with me,' said Facilis.

'There is no such thing in the world as truth and justice,' said Florian, 'or Trypho would be worse off than we are.'

'I don't know,' said Facilis. 'In better days I read somewhere that the worst of punishments is to be left unpunished.'

'Yes, and the proverb says, *Dio non paga il Sabbato*; but it is too late for us to moralise, Facilis.'

'So I think,' said Facilis despairingly. 'Oh, Florian, we are starving. I know quite well that one or two of the useless gold cups or salvers of Ardens, once in the melting-pot, would enable us to escape to another country, to begin a new life. And if that were possible I feel as if I could turn day labourer and once more be an honest, if not a happy man. And yet I say to you don't, don't, don't do it; and I say it to you, even if you feel as half-mad with hunger as I do at this moment.'

'We are in the power of these accursed wretches, Facilis. This is but a last dreadful and desperate chance. What does anything matter? When we have reached the bottom of the abyss we can sink no lower. I know where all the treasures are. They are carelessly kept. I know where the keys are hung.'

‘Don’t, don’t! Better die,’ said Facilis, and he rushed out of the room.

Florian knew the infamy of it all. He did not deceive himself by any sophistry about it, but feeling as though he was already wallowing in such a Stygian marsh of infamy that no deeper disgrace could be possible, he consented to take with him as a confederate a young thief who was familiar with all the tricks of burglary, and to relieve some of the treasure-stores of his brother’s castle of their superfluous wealth. The bad gang with whom he had come to be associated in his wild career of vice, bound themselves by the most awful oaths that, if he would consent to do this, he should be free of them for ever.

XVI

A forlorn and desperate castaway.—SHAKESPEARE.

THE night was agreed on. It was very late and pitch dark. Not a light was visible in any of the castle windows. The boy thief, guided by Florian, climbed through a small oriel window in one of the turrets, and, creeping noiselessly into the room where the respectable old butler slept—his posset had been drugged by a female confederate in the house—took his keys. He let Florian in by a postern gate, and Florian guided him to the place where the gold was kept. No special precaution had ever been taken to protect it, because

the castle was believed to be absolutely secure, as it had been for generations.

Ardens happened to be reading late at night in his bedroom, as he sometimes did when anything made him sleepless. His sleeplessness that night was due to the fact that, as he was undressing, an engraving of 'Happy Boyhood' had happened to catch his glance. He had stopped to gaze on the lovely features of his boy-brother, and this had led him into a train of thoughts so bitter as to murder sleep.

Suddenly, as he tried to read, he thought he heard a distant crash from an adjoining corridor, at the end of which was the castle treasury. He was not mistaken. Florian, as he moved about in nervous hurry, had knocked down a box in which was a cup of gold.

The faithful hound of Ardens, which slept in the young Duke's chamber, had heard the same noise, started to its feet, growled, and sniffed under the door of the room. Ardens listened intently. Now and then he fancied he heard a very low sound, but he would have thought no more of the matter had it not been for the angry restlessness of his dog. As this seemed to be increasing every moment, he noiselessly opened the door, and, taking his lamp, followed the dog, which at once sprang towards the passage leading into the next corridor. Under this door he thought he observed a faint glimmer of light, and no sooner had he opened it than the hound leapt with furious barking to the treasury, of which the door was partly open. The light which had been in the room was extinguished at

once, but Ardens had distinctly heard a whisper, and in another moment there was a scream and a sound of blows. Rushing in, Ardens saw a boy, struggling violently on the ground, whom the dog was keeping down in spite of the blows which a man was raining upon him. Ardens called off the hound and collared the boy, who had been in the act of thrusting various cups and plates of gold into a large leather bag. Then he flashed his light upon the man who stood there irresolute and terrified.

‘Merciful heavens!’ he exclaimed, recognising Florian, and the lamp fell with a crash from his nerveless hand.

His first impulse was to bid the wretch escape, but it was too late. Servants, hearing the noise, had come hurrying in, and before he could speak or think, both the boy and Florian were in their hands.

XVII

Who with repentance is not satisfied
Is not of heaven or earth.—GEORGE ELIOT.

THE two criminals were confined in separate rooms, which were carefully guarded; and with an aching heart Duke Ardens retired to spend the rest of the sleepless night in considering how to deal with this terrible calamity. He could not be a prosecutor in the case of his only brother; yet it did not seem right that an

attempt so nefarious should go wholly unpunished. Early in the morning he went first to the room of the boy culprit.

The miserable lad, when questioned, gave an outline of his past history. He was an orphan; his father had been a burglar, and had paid the penalty of death on the scaffold. His mother had drunk herself into a speedy grave. The boy had for a time lived on his wits, picking up his living in the streets, and sleeping on doorsteps. Then a 'pal' of his father's had taken him up, and had used him in attempts like this in which he had been captured.

Had he never had any religious teaching? Any instruction in the difference between right and wrong?

Yes; the slum which he haunted had been visited by one who had tried to save him. But what chance had 'the likes of him' of ever keeping himself from starvation except by crime?

'If a chance were given you,' said the Duke, 'of being saved from your bad surroundings and earning an honest livelihood, would you take it?'

'Wouldn't I?' said the boy. 'Only try me.'

'You shall have the chance,' said Ardens, and soon afterwards he took steps to have the boy placed in a distant school, where he met with stern and wise kindness, by which he was enabled in after years to earn his living as an honest mechanic.

After this conversation, Ardens, with a heart which foreboded all calamity, made his way to the room where Florian was confined.

On opening the door he found the watchman bending anxiously over his brother's bed.

'What is the matter?' he asked.

'I don't know, my Lord Duke. The young man'—for Florian was unknown to him—'seems to be very ill. He only began to be so ill about ten minutes ago, when he heard your voice from the next room.'

Ardens hurried to the bedside, and the acrid smell at once revealed to him what had occurred. Florian had concealed in his dress a small vial of poison, and had just swallowed it. The vial was still in his hand under the coverlet.

'Haste, haste, to my physician!' said Ardens. 'I will stay here. It may not yet be too late.'

Fortunately the physician happened to be in the castle. He came in, and, recognising the poison, administered the most powerful antidotes. But he said from the first that he feared it was too late. He might succeed in *arresting*, but hardly in *preventing* death.

The Duke ordered no pains, no skill, no expense to be spared. Florian was watched and nursed day and night. Many hours elapsed before he showed signs of consciousness, and Ardens constantly sat by his bedside holding the wasted hand.

At last Florian woke from his drowsiness and delirium, and murmured, 'Where am I? Is it not very dark?'

Ardens signed to the attendant to draw up the blind, and the sunlight poured in. Florian looked

round with a dim and languid gaze, and once more feebly asked, 'Where am I?'

'You are at home,' said the Duke.

'And—who—are—you?' Florian could scarcely articulate the words.

'I am your brother, Ardens.'

He had hardly spoken the words when Florian uttered a deep moan and sank into a long swoon.

When he recovered Ardens, who was still holding his hand, said in his gentlest tone, 'Be still, my brother. All is forgiven.' Ardens thought that he felt the faintest possible pressure from Florian's hand.

Next day he seemed much better, and Ardens said, 'Shall I read to you, Florian?'

'If you are so kind,' he faintly whispered.

'You used, in old days, to like poetry. Shall I read to you from some poet?'

'Yes.'

There was a poet of whose verses, as he remembered, Florian had once been fond. He took the little volume from the bookshelf, and in a low voice read aloud. One of the poems told how a poor forgiven woman had once washed the feet of Imrah with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. It was as follows:

She sat and wept beside his feet: the weight
Of sin oppressed her heart, for all the blame
And the poor malice of the worldly shame
For her were past, extinct, and out of date.
She would be melted by the heat of love,
By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
And purge the silver ore adulterate.

She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair
Still wiped the feet she was so blest to touch ;
And He wiped off the soiling of despair
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.
I am a sinner, full of doubts and fears ;
Make me a humble thing of sighs and tears.

Ardens looked up. On his brother's features was the agony of despair. Ardens tenderly tried to console him, but Florian could only murmur, 'Lost ! lost ! lost !'

'Not lost, my brother. Elyon says, "Thou hast destroyed thyself ; but in me is thy help."' '

Florian seemed to rally all his remaining strength, and said in a voice barely audible, 'Oh, Ardens, if there be any reward for goodness, may it be yours ! I am dying. I feel sure that I have not one hour more to live. Oh, what an awful shipwreck I have made of my life ! I threw away everything. I sinned against light and knowledge. I am utterly undone.'

'He who made you can remake you, Florian,' said Ardens.

'What lies beyond the grave for self-blighted lives I know not,' said Florian. 'My sins have been black as midnight ; they have made of all my years one long misery.'

'That very misery may have been to your soul as the purging flame, dear Florian,' said the Duke.

'I would not escape punishment if I could,' said Florian. 'I seem almost to long for it. Until I have been purified, as it were, ten times in the fire, I could not dare to face the presence of my Lord.'

He sank back exhausted with his effort, and for a short time lay motionless, and seemed to sleep. Then he whispered very low :

‘Ardens, have I been sleeping?’

‘I think so.’

‘Then it must have been in my sleep that our father Altus, whose death was caused by shame for me——’ Sobs choked his voice for a time; then he continued, ‘Our father seemed to me to come towards me, as though from heaven, and when I moaned and shrank, and hid my face from his expected wrath, he removed my hand, and oh! Ardens, I thought that he said, with a sad smile, “My son, you are forgiven.” Have *you* forgiven me, Ardens? What shame, what misery I have caused you, even from a boy! How vilely ungrateful and infamous I have been!’

‘I have forgiven you,’ said Ardens, ‘as utterly as I myself hope to be forgiven for all I have done wrong.’

‘Then, if father and you—whom I have most shamed, most outraged—if *you* forgive me, though I cannot ever forgive myself—yet, if *you* can forgive me—perhaps——’

He could speak no more. He had almost ceased to breathe. There came one more long fluttering breath, a sort of gleam seemed to pass for an instant across his features—and Florian was dead.

Ah! what a life had his been! He had sold his eternal jewel for a flash of delusive freedom—a delirious intoxication of wrongdoing, followed by the thickest mirk of misery. Long ere he died he had seen the



ARDENS WÉPT BESIDE THE CORPSE OF HIS ONLY BROTHER

infernal folly and curse into which he had been seduced by the demon of the basilisk. In those last hours he had felt not only an unspeakable remorse, but also an unspeakable longing to be other than he was. And as he lay dead his features resumed something of their boyish beauty. The painter who had painted him would have instantly recognised that, changed as he was, this young man was yet the boy who had sat to him as an ideal of 'Happy Boyhood.'

Ardens wept alone beside the corpse of his only brother, whose face, before he gave himself up to the enemy of Elyon, had been so lovely. No other eye was wet for him, save that of the aged Alciphron. He came to console Ardens. He saw Florian lying on his bier. The sinful soul had disappeared through that veil, 'dense as midnight, yet thin as a spider's web,' which separates us from the realms of the unknown. Ardens had told Alciphron about his death, and the last word which he had spoken; and the sage, uplifting his eyes and hands to heaven, had said, 'Perhaps—ah! yes, perhaps!'

XVIII

POOR FACILIS

Oh, is it weed, or fish, or floating hair
Above the nets at sea ?—KINGSLEY.

NOT many days after the capture of Florian, as a fisherman was hauling in his nets at the mouth of the river which flows through the great Porphyrian city, his hand became entangled in a mass of soft fair hair. He found that the net was being dragged down by the dead body of a young man. He called for help to his partners, and they laid the body on the deck of the fishing-boat. The 'dank and dripping weeds' were of coarse texture, but the face bore on it the stamp of refinement and high birth. They searched for any sign by which the corpse could be identified. There was nothing ; but surely he would be recognised ; surely some must be grieving for that lost youth !

It was the body of the hapless Facilis. On hearing the rumour that a burglar had been captured in the Castle of Duke Ardens, he knew that it must be Florian ; and, in agony of mind, he had rushed out into the night from the low slum in which he had been forced to live. He felt almost wild with passionate grief. He charged himself with having done harm to Florian, whom he loved with intense affection even in his fall. He was even unjust to himself in his self-condemnation ; for, in reality, he had often tried to lay

a restraining hand—weak as it was—upon the downward course of his friend. Where could he go? Whither could he fly? Aimlessly, wildly he wandered through the mirky streets. A thick drizzle of rain was falling, and, scantily clad as he was, he soon became wet through. Anything, anything if he could but escape from himself! Suddenly, at midnight, he found himself on the river bank. The thought of suicide occurred to him, but he rejected it as a crime. No! he would unmoor a boat which he saw fastened to a jetty, and would row to a large merchant vessel which was lying at anchor, and would offer himself as a common sailor. If he were carried away to some very far-off land, so much the better!

But when he had unfastened the boat, he stumbled from sheer weakness and want of food. Unable to recover his balance, he fell into the rushing and swirling waves. For a moment or two he buffeted with the current, but it was too strong for him. He was drawn under the water, and his body was swept to sea by the ebbing tide.

A line in the public journals the next day recorded that the body of an unknown youth, who was meanly dressed but apparently had once belonged to the higher classes, had been found at the mouth of the estuary. It lay in the mortuary, and had not been recognised by any who came to see it.

It was an infinitely sad and touching fact that many a father and many a weeping mother came fearing to find that this unknown corpse was all that

remained to them of some lost prodigal. Many of them looked at the dead youth very wistfully, and through eyes bedimmed with tears. None recognised him ; but one father, after a long gaze, turned to his drooping wife, and, pointing to the beautiful features on which the peace of death seemed to have effaced the stains of life, he said : ‘I am sure that this poor fellow did not die by suicide.’ And then he murmured to himself the lines of the poet—

‘And that he sinned is not believable,
For look upon his face. But if he sinned,
The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,
Shall stamp us after of whose fold we be.’

XIX

There is an hour, and Justice knows the date,
For long-enduring majesty to wait ;
That hour elapsed, the incurable revolt
Is punished, and down comes the thunder-bolt.

COWPER.

AND did Trypho escape ?

Hitherto his career of vice and dissipation had gone on apparently undisturbed. He had been

Left in God’s contempt apart
With ghastly smooth life—dead at heart.

The basilisk, wholly secure of his victim, and finding him a useful agent in increasing the numbers of his votaries, left him as yet untroubled to follow to the natural end the career he had chosen.

But he who sows the wind must later, if not sooner, reap the whirlwind.

Successful in many a vile intrigue, Trypho at last grew careless from over confidence. One night he was surprised in the house of Lord Rhodon whose friend he had pretended to be, and who returned home suddenly and unexpectedly from a journey. Trypho was wearing a mask of black velvet which the injured husband tried to tear off his face. Knowing how serious would be the consequences of his detection, and having entered the house unobserved, Trypho was determined at all hazards to conceal his identity, and in his fierce struggles, just as he was on the point of being overpowered, he drew a dagger and stabbed his rival. The dagger penetrated Rhodon's heart and he fell dead. Trypho rushed to escape, but his foot tripped and he was precipitated down a flight of steps and was seized.

He was tried for murder. As he stood in the felon's dock he raised his eyes to see the face of his judge.

It was Candidus !

Candidus, after finishing a most honourable career at the Gate School, had been assisted in his further studies by Ardens, who had become his most intimate friend. He had chosen the career of the law, and had shown such brilliancy, that with wholly unprecedented rapidity he had risen to the position of a judge. He bore the reputation of being at once the most learned and the most compassionate judge on the Porphyrian bench.

The trial was short. The evidence was decisive and fatal. The conduct of Trypho, his treachery to one who had been generally beloved, and who had treated him as a friend, the agonising remorse of her whom he had betrayed, his own notoriously evil character, the absence of any particle of exculpatory testimony, decided his fate. The jury unanimously brought him in guilty of murder, with no extenuating circumstance. Candidus had no choice but to sentence him to death. In his brief remarks he earnestly and solemnly exhorted the unhappy criminal so to use the few days which yet were left him as to make his peace with Heaven.

Before he died he sent for Candidus to visit him, confessed the justice of his doom, and bewailed the systematic perversion of his character. Ardens and the good Mage Alciphron also came to see him, and endeavoured with compassionate hearts to move him to repentance. All that he would say was, 'My life has been a ghastly and irreparable failure.'

'Irreparable is a word of the Purple Island,' said Alciphron gently. 'Elyon knows it not.'

But Trypho only shook his head. 'Too late,' he cried, 'too late!'

A week later a black flag was flying over the prison, and a great bell was tolling, stroke on stroke, chilling the hearts of all who heard it with its awful and monotonous vibrations.

Trypho was led out of his prison cell. Ardens and Alciphron walked on either side of him.

He knelt at the scaffold, and the axe fell.

Ardens went home with a gloom at his heart which seemed too deep for words. Alciphron knew with how many thoughts of anguish his mind must be full, for Florian was his brother, Trypho his schoolfellow. But his kind old friend gently pressed his hand and murmured,

‘Trust in the mercy of the Merciful.
His mercy endureth for ever, and beyond!’

Else I avert my eyes, nor follow them
Into that dark, obscure, sequestered place
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul,
He else made first in vain—which must not be.

BROWNING, *The Ring and the Book*.

On the dark barge were three shrouded figures ; the silent sea was of more than midnight blackness ; the spirits who guided the barge were silent. One of the three figures lay prostrate on the deck, face downwards, covered from head to foot with a sable pall, and neither moved nor spoke. It was Trypho. Robed also in black, and with his face bowed upon his knees, sat Florian. Beside him knelt another figure—it was that of poor Facilis, whose arm was passed over Florian’s shoulder. As the awful midnight seemed to deepen, Florian had muttered in a hollow voice, “ ‘To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever,’ and yet, and yet,” he added, ‘just before Death touched me with his icy finger, I saw, or thought I saw, or dreamed that I saw, the melancholy yet pitying face of my father, and he said, “ You are forgiven.” ’

‘And I,’ said Facilis, ‘when the river waves closed over my guilty wretchedness, did not feel so utterly beyond all hope. The darkness which might be felt, through which I seemed to be sinking into fathomless depths, changed into a dim light, and oh, Florian, I am quite sure that I saw the spirit of my sweet mother, and she laid a tender hand on my forehead and pushed back the wet hair which had fallen over my eyes, and turned on me a look of pardoning love.’

The prow of the dark barge grated on the shore, and one came on board and touched Trypho and bade him rise, and told Florian and Facilis to follow him. I saw them lost amid a crowd of shadowy ministrants; but one of the dim figures took Florian and Facilis by the hand, and though they disappeared into the darkness a ray fell through the darkness for a moment, and I saw that the figure was leading them towards a hill which looked rugged and awful, and yet at its summit, very far up, the gloom which enwrapped it seemed to be less impenetrable, and there might even have seemed to be ‘the sweet hue of the oriental sapphire.’ I seemed, too, to hear in faint far-distant tones the wailing burden of a hymn sung as by pleading voices :

Will the fruits of life brought forth,
 Pride and greed, and wealth and lust,
 Profit in the day of wrath,
 When the dust returns to dust ?
 Evil flower and thorny fruit
 Load the wild and worthless tree ;
 Lo, the axe is at the root !
Miserere Domine ! Miserere !

Fair without, and foul within,
When the honey'd husks are reft
From the bitter sweets of sin,
Bitterness alone is left.
Yet the wayward soul hath striven
Mostly Hell's ally to be
In the strife 'twixt Hell and Heaven—
Miserere Domine ! Miserere Domine !







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